

## **PANDEMIC PREPARATIONS: INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW**

We have been aware for a long time that there is potential for pandemics to spread across the globe. Flu A, Bird Flu, Ebola and now COVID-19 (Coronavirus). In the last few months we have seen the headlines of the spread of COVID-19. We have seen stories of quarantine, whole communities impacted, cruise ships and stock markets. We have seen guidance and updates from the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization. Today, Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared Coronavirus a global pandemic. We do not want you to panic but we do want you to be aware.

This is not the first time, nor will it be the last. And because contagion can spread before symptoms appear, we know that there is a need for common sense and caution. Information and good practices are our best antidote to panic.

Our Disaster Resource and Response Team has developed this questionnaire to help guide your churches preparations and response:

### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT:**

- Are you aware of the emergency or pandemic plan for you community? (Check with your local emergency manager or fire department)
- What resources are in place for vulnerable populations (Check with your Council on Aging, VNA office, local health agent, town hall)
- What will happen to those who may depend on meals programs or food pantries?
- What spiritual resources might your church offer to official responders and to the general community?

### **SERVICES OF WORSHIP:**

- Do you have encouragement and guidance in place for leaders and church members to stay home if they exhibit symptoms?
- Are you using precautions in worship: passing the peace by bowing not contact, hand sanitizers in pews, passing an offering or communion plate from person to person, etc.?
- Do you have plans in place so that everyone gets their own cup (plastic cups) during communion? Have you considered having pre-cut bread that is placed in the hands of folks by a Deacon? (No tearing of a common loaf or people taking their own piece.
- Have you considered having ushers wear gloves when collecting and counting the offering?
- Have you considered using electronic offering systems for your church so that people can still give even if they are not present?
- What about creating a sign like there are at doctor's offices? This would ask people to refrain from coming to church or staying if they feel sick, have a coughing, fever? This would be a gracious reminder that they are loved and that they consider not exposing others to potential illness.

- Do you have the option to live stream or video record worship for those who need to stay home or choose to stay home (or are required to by community quarantine)?
  - Churches have live streamed using Facebook, ZOOM, Skype and others programs.
  - Some churches record their services for local media, YouTube, etc.
  - Are you mindful of video restrictions such as copyright laws, and permissions needed to video tape and broadcast individuals (particularly children).

#### **FISCAL QUESTIONS:**

- How dependent are you on offering income? How might that be impacted if people choose to (or have to) stay away from public gatherings?
- Do you have an option for online giving? (see: [https://www.ucc.org/stewardship\\_electronic-giving](https://www.ucc.org/stewardship_electronic-giving))
- What impact might there be if renters cancel programs due to public gathering restrictions or anxiety?

#### **COMMUNICATION:**

- What is your plan for communicating updates and concerns will your entire congregation?
- General Advice in the event of a quarantine is to have 2 weeks of supplies in your house in case people are encouraged to stay out of public places. Do you have a plan to communicate this to church/community members?

#### **KEY LEADERSHIP BACKUP**

- Do you have backups for key leaders in case they become ill or quarantined (treasurer, offering counters, deacons, faith formation instructors, organist, pastor, staff)?

#### **PASTORAL CARE:**

- Do you have a plan to connect with the more vulnerable population within your church for support and wellness checks?
- How might you handle funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc., if public gatherings are limited?

**The SNEUCC Disaster Resource and Response Team has provided most of this resource. We, the Illinois Conference, have modified it and added more things for congregations and pastors to consider.**

#### **STAY INFORMED AND PREPARED WITH RESOURCES:**

- Check out resources on our Conference's Disaster Resource and Response Team webpages:
  - Pandemic info: <https://www.sneucc.org/blogdetail/93155>
  - General guidance: <https://www.macucc.org/disasterresource>
- CDC COVID-19 updates: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION RESOURCES: <https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/en/>
- FEMA, general disaster guidance for Houses of Worship: <https://www.fema.gov/faith-resources>