

March 14, 2020

From: Bill Wildhack, Stated Clerk and Manager of Communications  
To: Minister Members of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay and Clerks of Session  
Subj: Additional Info and Resources

On Friday, we learned that the Centers for Disease Control had released state-specific guidance for Florida, and we continue to hear from presbytery leaders across the country with their suggestions.

In our conference call today we (Patrice, Libby, and I) discussed the importance of finding ways to help you help support public health officials, healthcare providers, emergency personnel and others by working to slow the transmission of COVID-19 so that healthcare services are not overwhelmed by “flattening the curve” of the rate of new cases.

- If you're not familiar with the term “flatten the curve,” this link to Fox 13 Tampa Bay's website has a helpful description and explanation of its importance:  
<https://www.fox13news.com/news/cdcs-flatten-the-curve-graphic-shows-why-social-distancing-amid-coronavirus-pandemic-is-necessary>

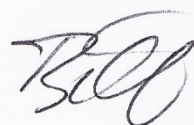
We offer the info below to you in the hopes of empowering you, as the CDC guidance says, “to implement recommended actions, particularly in ways that **protect persons at risk of severe illness such as older adults and persons with serious underlying health conditions (e.g. Dialysis patients, congestive heart failure, emphysema)**,” especially since so many members of our congregations and organizations are in one or more of those categories.

We know that this word is coming to you on Saturday afternoon, and we regret that we did not get this to you sooner.

IF YOU ARE OFFERING WORSHIP ONLINE THIS WEEKEND: please let me know ASAP so that we might share that with others who may not be able to offer that opportunity..

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR ONLINE WORSHIP THIS WEEKEND: please send me an email ([statedclerk@pbty.com](mailto:statedclerk@pbty.com)) and I will reply with whatever information I gather when I have information to share.

Blessings,



## CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL UPDATES

Some key takeaways from the CDC guidance for Florida (last accessed at 12:35 p.m. on Saturday, March 14, 2020):

### **Bottom Line Up Front:**

**Florida has had several COVID-19 confirmed cases and exposures related to ports of entry, including shipping ports and airports. Additionally, Florida is a large tourism hub and has an older age population. However, at this time there is not widespread transmission.** Due to the current level of COVID-19 transmission in the United States, and Florida's large older adult population, CDC recommends certain community mitigation activities to help slow the spread of COVID-19 into the community and to protect vulnerable members of the community. CDC recommends the following interventions be implemented at this time (Table). These recommendations may be updated, if necessary, based on any changes in the current local situation.

**Goals** The goals for using mitigation strategies for Florida are to protect:

- Individuals at increased risk for severe illness, including older adults and persons of any age with underlying health conditions (See Appendix A).
- The healthcare workforce and critical infrastructure workforces

Some excerpts from the "Every Community and Faith-based Organization" section of the table mentioned above:

- Cancel large gatherings (e.g., >250 people), and smaller gatherings that may bring persons together from multiple parts of the country.
- Consider screening persons at smaller gatherings
- Determine ways to continue providing support services to individuals at increased risk of severe disease (services, meals, checking in) while limiting group settings and exposures.

**• For organizations that serve high-risk populations, consider cancelling gatherings of more than 10 people.**

*(Emphasis added, and note, again, that many members of our congregations and organizations are in one or more of the "high-risk" categories.)*

- Encourage staff and members to stay home and notify organization administrators of illness when sick.

- Encourage personal protective measures among organization/members and staff (e.g., stay home when sick, handwashing, respiratory etiquette).
- Clean frequently touched surfaces at organization gathering points daily.
- Ensure hand hygiene supplies are readily available in building.

Please download and review a copy of the full document by clicking here ([https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/FL\\_Community\\_Mitigation.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/FL_Community_Mitigation.pdf)) and check the CDC Coronavirus “Schools, Workplaces & Community Locations” webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html> for updates.

The CDC also now has an updated [Resources for Community- and Faith-Based Leaders](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html) page at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html> with guidance, cleaning and disinfection recommendations, and a checklist for community and faith leaders. The

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR HOLDING MEETINGS AND OTHER GATHERINGS ELECTRONICALLY**

**Libby told us this morning about [FreeConferenceCall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com/)** (<https://www.freeconferencecall.com/>), a service that she’s used for conference calls with more than 100 participants at a time. This can be a handy tool for brief meetings for staff, session, deacons, etc, including audio-only communications with the rest of a congregation (like “dial in at [time] to listen to the audio of our worship service). Unlike monthly subscription or fee-based services, their website says:

### *A Conferencing Solution You Can Feel Good About*

We offer all the features and capabilities of the largest paid-for conferencing brands but for free. Why? Because we believe everyone deserves access to world class communication tools, even if they can’t pay right now. If you can pay a little, that’s great. Our revolutionary pay what you can pricing lets you pay whatever you think is fair, and you can feel good knowing your contribution helps create a place where people all over the world can freely connect and share.

**The Presbytery frequently uses [Zoom.us](https://zoom.us/pricing) (<https://zoom.us/pricing>)** for commission and committee meetings, and it provides for both video teleconferencing and audio-only options. We’ve heard of a growing number of churches across the country using it for worship, too. It’s free for up to 100 participants for up to 40 minutes at a time for as many meetings as you want in a month. (*NOTE: Due to recent increased use, the phone-in option may not be available for Zoom meeting using the free service.*) For 14.99/mo, you can have meetings for up to 100 for up to 24 hours(!!!) at a time with unlimited minutes per month.

Several churches have used [Facebook Live](https://www.facebook.com/facebookmedia/solutions/facebook-live) (<https://www.facebook.com/facebookmedia/solutions/facebook-live>) to stream worship services in the past and will be doing so now. Click on the link to learn more about that.

## OTHER SUGGESTIONS

A recent email from Tricia Dykers-Koenig in the PC(USA)'s office for mid-council relations (presbyteries and synods are mid-councils between the session and the General Assembly) offered tips from several different sources. A few stood out:

- **Set up giving online.** Contributions to the church can continue even when worship is canceled or attendance diminished through any of several online giving options. Look for a service that integrates with your church's database software or consider the [Presbyterian Foundation's Online Giving Program](#), which offers low transaction fees, then encourage members to establish automatic recurring gifts.
- **Adopt rules for electronic meetings.** Sessions and other church committees can meet electronically via videoconference or teleconference if the church has adopted appropriate procedures for such in advance. Make sure your session's manual of operations includes these provisions *before* you need to use them, even if you don't have the technology yet!
- **What about pastoral care?** This is the time to remind your deacons, elders, Stephen's Ministers, and staff that they should not make pastoral visits if they are themselves feeling unwell. This is also a time to think about how to help people feel the care offered by your congregation without physical contact; do you have a robust ministry of sending written notes, making phone calls, and contacting your shut-in or ill members or those experiencing loss by electronic means?
- **What are you doing now in planning about how you will get people back?** For the next few weeks or even months, it is likely that there will either be smaller congregations present in sanctuaries; or we will make the decision or be ordered to cancel worship altogether. People will find out that there are other things to do on Sunday morning; they will find other ways to meet their spiritual needs. The trend in this country is already away from worship attendance. What kind of event will you sponsor, what kind of special worship will you have, what kind of celebration will you have to welcome people back to church when this is over? And that is what we need to remember—it will be over.

*We'll look for ways to add more resources in the days to come . . . and feel free to share them with me at [statedclerk@pbtv.com](mailto:statedclerk@pbtv.com). You can also call me on my direct line at (813) 308-3200; please leave voicemail if I don't answer – I'll get an email with your voicemail moments after you hang up (please note, though, that number can't receive text messages).*