

Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Presbytery North Central Iowa
Presbytery of Prospect Hill



“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body... Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” Matthew 6:25–27

Should churches continue to have worship services?

Based on current recommendations by the State of Iowa’s Department of Health, the Presbyteries of North Central Iowa and Prospect Hill strongly urge church sessions to consider canceling large group gatherings, including Sunday morning worship until April 5th, 2020. (This is not a directive from your presbytery executive, but a recommendation.) Remember, worship is the responsibility of the session and can only be canceled by them.

The PC(USA) has prepared an excellent [resource for church preparedness](#).

Churches:

- Encourage members to stay home if they are sick.
- In addition to encouraging members to wash their hands, have alcohol-based hand sanitizers (containing at least 60% alcohol) in easily accessible areas, like outside of bathrooms or at entrances.
- Increase diligence around cleaning and sanitizing.
- Possibly modify church services (at the discretion of the Session or pastor)
 - During communion, avoiding the shared loaf of bread and common cup.
 - Consider suspending passing of the peace for the foreseeable future. Waving or nodding are acceptable substitutes.
 - Do NOT pass the offering plate but rather place it in a central location.

Worshippers:

- Support the continued ministry of the church by helping your neighbors and staying current on your tithes and pledges.
- Participate in worship and church activities to your own level of comfort.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Wash your hands regularly or clean with alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Worshipers should honor the decisions and avoid making judgements about how others participate in the life of the church during this situation.

Ministry to Vulnerable or Affected Persons in Your Congregation or Community (Iowa Faith Leadership Network)

Be aware that this is a time of fear and uncertainty for many people. Do not 'force' people to do or accept things; invite them. Avoid singling people out for exclusion, and respect people's privacy. Gain people's consent before sharing personal information in prayer requests or when offering help.

[Here](#) is a resource for those feeling anxious about the current situation.

Be aware that many households may not have the resources to stock up on food and essential items in advance if they were to become ill or be under quarantine. A volunteer should safely be able to leave a cardboard box with supplies on a doorstep and call via cell phone to let the person know it has been delivered, without significant risk to one's health.

Who are the people in your congregation who would be willing to call on quarantined members of the congregation to check on needs and help to lessen the sense of isolation?

Which children in your community may need additional 'backpack meals' sent home before or during a quarantine, or if schools close?

Nursing homes and senior living communities may be closed to the public. Pastoral care may be provided by congregational phone call and/or cards.

Quick setup for streaming worship or sermon via the internet

If your church is closed or attendance is extremely low due to coronavirus concerns, but you still want to livestream a worship service or sermon, here are some accessories for your smartphone that might help you stream a service on Facebook Live or similar platform.

[Lavalier Lapel Microphone](#) Omnidirectional Condenser Mic for Smartphone

25 feet 3.5mm Male to Female Stereo [Audio Extension Cable](#)

(If you have a sound system with an appropriate 'Line Out' port, choose a different cable as needed)

[Flexible short Tripod](#) with Wireless Remote Phone Holder. This can be used to secure a cell phone to a pew, lectern, music stand, or pulpit

OR

[51" Adjustable Tripod Stand](#) with Cell Phone Mount. This lets you place the smartphone in a stationary position in front of the speaker.

Our session needs to meet. Can we do this over the phone? On a video call?

Roberts Rules of Order allows for organizations to hold electronic meetings and votes so long as everyone is able to participate and be heard. North Central Iowa and Prospect Hill Presbyteries' By-laws include provisions for electronic meetings.

Some or all of the members may attend a meeting by electronic means so long as the meeting provides conditions for simultaneous aural communications among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room. Notice of any meeting where attendance by electronic means may occur must include an adequate description of how to participate. In order to be counted towards a quorum, participants must have a means of submitting motions in writing simultaneously with the meeting. When any member is attending electronically, votes must be taken aurally, by roll call, or show of hands via video.

Our congregation celebrates communion every Sunday. How can we do it when we're live streaming and people are at home?

This situation can very well be considered similar to home communion for congregation members who are homebound. You can preside over the sacrament via video streaming, then request that those who would like the elements (in disposable, or individual packets) contact the church for delivery, or designate a location where they can be picked up.

Our church has a [insert trip here] planned for the summer. Should we cancel?

It's hard to predict that far ahead as to how and where this virus will spread. Our denomination has cancelled all international and domestic travel "for the foreseeable future". Unless you absolutely have to make immediate plans, we recommend you wait to make a final decision until at least mid-April.

The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance **Preparedness for Pandemics Guide** can be found [here](#) in English, Spanish and Korean languages.

Reflect Christ

In these anxious days, the church can shine as a light of hope, care, faith, patience, and prudence, demonstrating for the world how our faith provides true assurance against worry and fear.

[Here](#) is a resource for those feeling anxious about the current situation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Should Churches Offer Holy Communion?

YES, BUT the common cup (intinction) is problematic because unclean fingers or breath droplets can get into the common liquid and potentially transmit or receive droplets of COVID-19. Additionally, putting bread cubes on trays and passing them down the aisles also allows for cross-contamination as people's hands reaching for the cubes are not clean.

INSTEAD churches should switch to individual cups that can be served without hand-to-hand transmission, meaning that receivers' hands should not touch cups other than their own. Church celebrants should hold the trays of individual cups.

Finally, **celebrants should consider wearing gloves.** We are not insistent that gloves must be worn, although we see precedence in food service. Gloves would remove uncertainty, provided the celebrant keeps the gloves from cross-contamination.

Should Churches offer Baptismal Remembrance fonts?

NO. Some churches have baptismal fonts at the entrance to the sanctuary or chapel so that congregants can dip their fingers in and place them on their foreheads to "remember their baptisms." Because this is a common liquid that more than one person uses, it can potentially transmit COVID-19 droplets, so it should not be used.

Baptisms themselves can be done without transmitting droplets as long as none of the participants are infected.

Should Churches pass the peace?

NO. This practice can be suspended for the foreseeable future.

Should Churches pass an offering plate?

NO, durable objects can retain droplets of active COVID-19 for hours and certainly a few seconds while being passed down a pew or row of chairs. Even if ushers wiped them down with Clorox wipes between each pew, the alcohol wouldn't have time to dry and it would still allow people to transmit germs down the row.

INSTEAD, place individual offerings in a stationary basket or plate. The people move, not the plates. Perhaps churches should consider a stationary placement of the offerings during, before, or after worship.

This would be a great time to set up online giving. Remind offering counters to not touch their face or mouth while counting, as the virus could still be active hours later, depending on the environment.

Should Churches use hymnals?

Preferably NO, but YES if necessary, hymnals contain the words of the faith and encourage congregational singing. They may continue to be used. **BUT treat hymnals like doorknobs** and disinfect your hands after use.

Single-use bulletins are better than hymnals. **The best alternative is to project hymns on projectors/flatscreen TVs**, rather than print more/longer bulletins and use more paper.

Be aware of copyright laws. Just because your church has hymnals full of songs, doesn't mean you have the right to copy, project, or broadcast those hymns. Please check which hymns are in the public domain and which are copyrighted. Each church should have a subscription to one a song licensing organization. You can search for a song's copyright status and get licensing information here:

CCS <https://christiancopyrightsolutions.com/>

CCLI <https://songselect.ccli.com/>

One License <https://www.onelicense.net/> is offering a free 30-day subscription during this pandemic.

Cleaning

Bleach is recommended for disinfecting durable surfaces. Anything that causes bubbles destroys COVID-19. "If it suds, it strips." Alcohol and bleach-based cleaners work best.

Children's toys and other durable surfaces in classrooms or nurseries should be disinfected often. Toys with fur or fabric (stuffed animals, etc) should not be used during this season of COVID-19 concerns.

Clean your phone after church at the same time you wash your hands. We touch our phones a LOT.

Keeping the offering coming when church is canceled.

Now is a great time to start talking about online or automated giving. [Here is a sample auto-deduction form that members can use to set up ACH withdrawals with the church bank.](#) Members can also contact their bank about using BillPay to make sure they are consistently contributing.

Contact your website administrator about adding a DONATE button to your homepage. In the short term, you could even use a [PayPal](#), [Square](#), or [Venmo](#) account.

Food Service

For coffee hour food service or potlucks, tongs or spoons should be made available so that the actual food is not contaminated by fingers in the food, with resting areas outside of the food for those tongs or utensils. But before you sit down and consume, you should wash or disinfect your hands. Treat tongs like doorknobs: use them, but wash your hands afterwards.

Multi-Use Spaces

Do thorough cleaning between uses of a multi-use space. If this is impossible, consider removing as many durable objects as possible in multi-use spaces so there are fewer surface areas to clean.

Staff Policies and Telecommuting Possibilities

Church Staff should pre-emptively figure out how to accomplish as much of their jobs as possible remotely. Install remote desktop software with secure practices, put documents (securely) in the cloud via Dropbox or OneDrive or Google Drive. Human Resource church committees should set expectations of what they want staff to do in case of feeling sick, fear of getting sick, or a potential shutdown so that as much ministry coordination as possible can happen remotely.

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BASICS ABOUT COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)

COVID-19 is transmitted by **inhaling droplets from infected persons**. It is more like the flu, not like measles, meaning it does not sit in the air, it settles in droplets. Though droplets can be airborne at outset, transmission occurs when those droplets you touch are inhaled or ingested. Droplets can rest with active viruses on durable surfaces for hours depending on the surface and environment.

In short, the concerns are:

1. Immediate vicinity of COVID-19 infected persons where droplets from coughs or sneezes or breath can be inhaled by other people.
2. Droplets from sneezes or coughs from infected persons on surfaces.

Symptoms incubation period is 2-14 days, so if you think you might be affected, stay home for 14 days along with any immediate members of your family. Mild symptoms present for 80% of the population that has been exposed. At this time (March 2020), the best research and case history shows that **people over 60 years of age and those with underlying medical issues are the most vulnerable**. These are significant demographics in many of our faith communities!

BASIC PRECAUTIONS As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local health departments, follow these basic steps to resist illness:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. If you use a tissue, throw it in the trash, then wash or sanitize your hands.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.