

## **PWF WORLD MISSIONS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCHES IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The purpose of this document is to help churches recognize, plan, adapt and respond to the current COVID-19 crisis. The following pages contain information about what COVID-19 is, why churches should respond to the global pandemic and a recommended approach on how to do so. In addition to becoming familiar with the following, it is advised to also follow instructions from the World Health Organization (WHO), public health officials and your respective government. This document is intended to be received as additional information to national plans and WHO recommendations, not a replacement. It has been prepared in collaboration with numerous Pentecostal relief and development organizations and health experts. Much of the content is based on recommendations provided by Living Waters (Houston, U.S.) and Tearfund, among others. The contents of this document may be modified according to different contexts and translated to different languages.

### **What is COVID-19 (The Coronavirus)?**

COVID-19, standing for coronavirus disease 2019, is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. It was classified by WHO as a pandemic on March 10, 2020, signifying a potential devastating impact on the whole world. It is highly contagious, and currently there is no vaccine or treatment. Most people (roughly 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. According to WHO, around one out of every six people who get COVID-19 become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing. The disease is most dangerous for elderly people and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, continuous cough and breathing difficulties; however, people may carry and spread COVID-19 without showing any symptoms.

According to WHO, COVID-19 can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth, which are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Other individuals are then exposed when touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

### **Basic protective measures against COVID-19**

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to, as best as possible, adhere to these protective measures:

1. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. In case water and soap are not available, use a hand sanitizer containing 60% alcohol.
2. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze; dispose the used tissue immediately and wash your hands.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
4. Avoid physical contact, and when possible, stay home and away from crowds.
5. Maintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
6. Stay home, especially if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention according to the national health guidelines.
7. Use alternative ways of greeting that do not include physical contact.
8. Stay informed and follow advice given by your government, local officials and healthcare provider.

### **Why should churches be responding to COVID-19?**

Churches and pastors are uniquely positioned to help reduce the spread of the disease. An example is the crucial role churches and religious leaders played during the Ebola crisis in Africa.

COVID-19 spreads by people who are in close contact. If changes are not made to worship services and other gatherings, churches can become places where the disease spreads. This may put church members at risk of contracting COVID-19 and further endanger the lives of both church members and those in the surrounding communities.

This is also an opportunity to share the love of God in word and deed. Churches can carry out the *integral mission* — the inseparable proclamation and demonstration of the gospel as seen in the life and work of Jesus.

Churches can instill hope in response to fears related to COVID-19 and care for peoples' spiritual, emotional, physical, social and safety needs through different church ministries.

Churches can leverage ways they are already speaking out on behalf of the marginalized, so that they would not become further marginalized during this public health emergency.

### **How can churches respond?**

Churches should consider responding in four main ways:

1. Reduce the spread of the disease at your church and in the communities.
2. Care for your church members.

***Be safe*** by taking precautions.  
***Be smart*** by staying informed.  
***Be kind*** by supporting each other.  
***Pray.***

3. Mobilize the church to care for communities.
4. Pray to God for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1. Reduce the spread of COVID-19 at your church**

While the church is called not to abandon the call to worship and fellowship, it is recommended to find new avenues as to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among church members and in the communities. Pastors can also use their influence to communicate clear messages.

#### **a. Make modifications to how worship and fellowship takes place**

While the spiritual and social care provided by the church is more important than ever in a time of a global pandemic, our love and concern for the whole person means we should also take action to care for the physical wellbeing of our church members and communities. In order to make sure the church is not contributing to the spread of COVID-19, it is encouraged to strongly consider suspending normal church gatherings until the immediate threat of the disease's spread passes. This means being creative about how the church worships and fellowships.

Many governments have already, or will soon be, restricting public gatherings, including religious services. In response to this, churches should also consider refraining from congregating, or at minimum they should modify church services to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Suggested Practices for Reducing the Spread:

- Meet in small groups of less than 10 people.
- Request the refrain of attending meetings or services from people showing signs of infection.
- Ensure people in risk groups do not attend services, but instead receive a phone call or other attention.
- Ask everyone to sit or stand at least 1 meter away from others.
- Meet outside in the open air.
- Limit physical contact, including when greeting one another. See alternative greetings provided by the national health officials that are appropriate for your cultural context.
- Avoid sharing communal items such as cups and plates and offertory plates and baskets.
- Record messages to be sent out via social media when you are not able to meet as normal.

In addition, be sure to regularly **clean and sanitize** the church facilities and equipment, especially areas frequently touched, including surfaces, handles, lecterns and microphones.

Finally, make sure there are **facilities for handwashing**, including additional **handwashing stations** at the entrance to the church.

### **b. Communicate correct and clear messages**

Pastors can use their positions of influence to communicate the following messages:

- COVID-19 is a serious disease that we need to prevent from spreading to others.
- The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, continuous cough and breathing difficulties.
- If someone is experiencing those symptoms, it is recommended they self-quarantine for 14 days and follow the national health guidelines for seeking medical attention.
- Basic protective measures against the COVID-19 (refer to page one).
- If someone gets COVID-19, it does not mean they have a spiritual ailment or they are punished by God.
- No person should be stigmatized for contracting COVID-19 or blamed for having had little faith.
- Encourage those who are very sick to seek medical attention according to the national health guidelines (see the example set by Jesus in Luke 17:14).
- No person should be condemned for having practiced caution, remained home or avoided physical greetings. Instead, the exemplary behavior should be highlighted in the church.
- The importance of praying for the affected; comforting and encouraging those who are experiencing fear and anxiety.

This communication can be provided by such means as online sermons, recordings, phone calls, text messages, social media and mass media (radio and television).

In addition, much false information circulates around COVID-19. It is important for churches and church leaders to share evidence-based information from reliable sources only.

*Note: Always refer to what national authorities and the WHO are encouraging you to communicate.*

### **c. Provide an example of right living**

Church leaders should model behaviors that have the potential to save lives:

- Taking all the protective measures against COVID-19 (refer to page one).

- If asked to pray for church members who have COVID-19 symptoms, doing so while maintaining proper distance of 1 meter (3 feet) and following the preventative health measures.
- Modeling positive attitudes, sincere action and faith in God regarding the pandemic.

## **2. Care for church members**

### **a. Prepare church members for a time of isolation**

During a COVID-19 outbreak, or in an attempt to prevent it, church members may become physically isolated, worried and fearful. They will miss a central part of church life, which is gathering for fellowship, prayer and worship. Prepare church members for isolation by finding ways for members to stay in touch and provide spiritual support to one another. Help families grow their own spiritual life of prayer, Bible reading, meditation and other spiritual disciplines.

### **b. Prepare ways to stay in touch with church members to provide care**

Ensure you have contact information of all church members (where possible) as to stay in touch through phone calls or messages in times of isolation. You can also map out the most vulnerable (sick or elderly persons), among the church members, and ensure they have food, water, soap and other basic supplies. When providing care, make sure you are not placing the elderly and those with underlying health conditions at risk of contracting COVID-19.

### **c. Address your church members' spiritual or theological questions**

During times of crisis and suffering, many people ask such things as, "Why does a loving God allow suffering?" This remains the toughest question across all time and cultures.

It is good to address difficult questions by drawing wisdom from the Bible and the life of Jesus. Jesus understands our suffering and accompanies us through it, having suffered more than any other human. Jesus also understands our fears and asks us to bring them to Him in prayer (1 Peter 5:7). The Christian's role during this testing time remains that of bringing healing to a broken world, revealing God's love and glory, and pointing people to the fullness of life (John 10:10) that is more than physical health.

## **3. Mobilize church to care for communities**

The Church does not exist for itself, but to love God and to love our neighbor. Christians should witness during this pandemic by speaking and living lives of hope and love. Many churches also have social ministries that can be leveraged to address the pandemic in many ways to demonstrate love for their communities. If your church already has a church mobilization group or a group of volunteers, after they have familiarized themselves with the basic protective measures against COVID-19, consider how they could serve the community.

Examples include:

- Collaborate broadly with authorities, civil society other churches and faith leaders.
- Ensure the whole community receives information about COVID-19 and preventative measures.
- Access to information by those in vulnerable positions should be paid careful attention to. Children, people who are illiterate and persons with disabilities need to receive preventative information as well. Accessible information can be provided through posters, videos, simple picture demonstrations, videos in sign languages and material in Braille writing.
- Ensure that the whole community has access to hand washing facilities and water.
- Check that vulnerable and isolated people have enough food and other basic needs.
- Respond to loneliness and fear by setting up an online community chat or support group.
- If you are using social media to stay connected as a church, be sure to reach out to others in your community with the same channels. Positive messages of hope can make isolation less difficult. In this way, you are letting people know they are not alone with their fears.
- Provide food and supplies to healthcare workers who will most likely become overburdened during this outbreak.
- Work with health officials to help identify cases of COVID-19 in the community.
- Share stories from the Bible and discuss what they mean in your context and during this time. A great example is the story of Jesus calming the storm found in Mark 4:35–41.

Church members are encouraged to always be sharing the love of God, in word and deed. At the same time, during a time of crisis, it is important not to exploit people's fear or expectation of assistance for the purpose of evangelizing. Rather, consider how you can best love people by telling them the story of how your faith in God is helping you respond to this crisis.

#### **4. Prayer and Intercession**

The Church believes that God is active in the affairs of humankind, so it is important to remind yourself and others in your church that we need to pray for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a prayer that can be prayed.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*  
*(Philippians 4:6-7)*

#### **Prayer for the World**

Our heavenly Father, we come to Your loving throne of grace through Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We come with the comforting knowledge that You have told us, “Cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). We are grateful You know our anxieties and concerns. We are grateful for Your divine wisdom that You give liberally to all who ask (James 1:5).

As we pray for the peoples of the earth, we ask that Your Holy Spirit will reveal Your mercy, Your truth, Your compassion and Your desire that none should be lost. Through Your Word and Spirit, bring us to personal and corporate repentance. May Your Kingdom will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray for those who are directly suffering from the impact of COVID-19: those who are sick at home, those sick in hospitals and care facilities, those who are caring for their sick loved ones. We appeal to the blood of Jesus for healing grace.

We pray for the poor, the marginalized and those who struggle to receive effective medical care. Lord have mercy upon them. May our hearts be turned to them and the provision of their needs.

We pray for the men and women serving in the various medical fields. Thank You for their willingness to risk their own health. Protect them and their families.

Our heavenly Father, thank You that we can come before You and You never sleep. Even as You see the sparrow and the hairs on our heads, You know our pitiful condition. Come Holy Spirit, bring us hope, bring us comfort, bring us peace and bring us love for You and for one another. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

By Dr. A.D. Beacham

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## Global Body of Christ United Through Prayer

Also, please consider joining the **Unite714** prayer movement, which is based on the direction God gave for responding to pestilence in 2 Chronicles 7:14. You can sign-up to participate, obtain more information and stay up to date at [www.unite714.com](http://www.unite714.com). Each week, we will pray the same prayer in our churches and networks and encourage individuals to pray this prayer at 7:14 a.m. and 7:14 p.m. in their time zone. Once you sign up, you should receive a weekly prayer and prayer target to share with your constituents. It can also be found at [www.pwfellowship.org](http://www.pwfellowship.org).

## **Some resources and links**

***Message from Dr. Billy Wilson, chairman of PWF and Empower21?***

<https://vimeo.com/399229556>

***Message from Secretary General of the UN***

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=911052209328888>

***World Health Organization***

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

<https://www.facebook.com/WHO/videos/vb.154163327962392/513817142873722/?type=2&theater>

What's App WHO Health Alert Group

***World Council of Churches***

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/covid-19>