

REACTING TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC OPTIONS FOR NVBA CHURCHES TO CONSIDER

PRESENTED BY THE COMMISSION ON CIVIC AND SOCIAL ACTIONS

THIS DOCUMENT A FINAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO EDITING, ADDITIONS, AND OTHER REVISIONS BY THE MODERATORS OF THE NVBA. THE PRIMARY DRAFTERS ARE DR. GEORGE W. FARMER, JR. AND REV. Q. BERNARD DRISKELL. IT WAS REVIEWED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON CIVIC AND SOCIAL ACTIONS.

INTRODUCTION

The world-wide pandemic caused by the coronavirus which leads to the Covid-19 disease has changed the ways of life for everyone in the world. Faith-based organizations are now struggling with the reality that our current manners of worshipping could cost our congregants their very lives. Indeed, in the United States numerous pastors and lay worshippers have already died “in the service of the Lord.”

The science concerning this disease is clear. We are facing a virulent virus that is highly contagious. Being in the proximity of an infected person (six feet or as much as twelve feet) leaves an individual most susceptible to being infected as well. Moreover, the aggressive nature of this disease is such that its ability to attack the respiratory system of its victims it can kill a victim in a matter of days – especially if the victim is already vulnerable (over age 60 and/or with other physical weaknesses). These realities have led our governmental leaders to order the population to “shelter in place” and quarantine themselves when even the possibility of exposure to infected persons has occurred. The governmental guidance prohibits gatherings of more than ten people at a time and requires appropriate “social distances” (at least six feet apart) between each other at all times.

Needless to say, these restrictions are most problematic for Christian worship services – even in small congregations. Consequently, our churches and our pastors are faced with the requirement

to find new ways to meet the spiritual needs of our members. We must determine how to satisfy spiritual responsibilities we have to ensure that we are providing both spiritual sustenance and comfort to our members. Conduct care visits by phone or virtually by using platforms such as FaceTime or Google Hangout, especially if the individuals are in quarantine or isolation. Faith leaders also need to know that there are resources to help them support these people.

Simply put, we have devise alternate practices to replace and/or supplement our traditional approaches to worship, teaching, and other interactions. We are at a crossroads wherein we must identify new ways to minister and evangelize. Many of the listed options, churches are already practicing. Others are worth considering. Moreover, we encourage churches to share with us additional initiative that they are considering so that all of us can benefit from the combined ingenuity of our many spiritual leaders. We must work together so that we all might continue to “serve this present age.”

ALTERNATE PRACTICES FOR DEALING WITH CHURCH MINISTRIES

Helping in your community recognizing Depression/Domestic Abuse in your Congregation during COVID-19

Here are important online or telephone support services for people dealing with domestic abuse, depression or people in crisis:

Online social support

[Daily Strength](#)

Online social network centered on support groups, where users provide one another with emotional support by discussing their struggles and successes with each other.

[In the Rooms](#)

Free online recovery tool that offers 130 weekly online meetings for those recovering from addiction and related issues.

[Support Groups Central](#)

Offers virtual support groups on numerous mental health conditions — free or low-cost. Website also offered in Spanish.

[Recovery 2.0](#)

Offers holistic approach to overcoming addiction, as well as support and training for every stage of recovery, and honors all paths to recovery from all addictions. It's a place for healing, connection, personal development and fun.

Remote 12-step meetings

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[Al-Anon](#)

[Narcotics Anonymous](#)

[Nar-anon](#) (family groups)
National Hotlines

[SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline](#)

1-800-985-5990 provides 24/7 crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

1-800-273-8255 provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

[Substance Use Treatment Helpline](#) (SAMHSA)

1-800-662-4357 provides free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referrals and information (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

[United Way Helpline](#)

Dial 211 for 24/7 information about community resources, basic needs assistance and other social services.

For treatment resources that can be used to access vital recovery support online from home: SAMSHA's Behavioral Health Treatment [Services Locator](#)

By becoming a resource for everyone, inside your doors and out, pastors can help to reduce the stigma of COVID-19 itself, as well as the normal human difficulties the disease exacerbates. Make helping people stay healthy or get healthy a focus of your faith community's mission.

- 1) As your own members' safety allows, houses of worship may provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your churches. Have supplies on hand such as soap, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and disposable face masks.
- 2) Faith leaders might reach out to secular organizations to maintain connection throughout the larger community. Churches and other faith groups might partner with schools and community centers to provide "grab-and-go" bags of food for those in need while abiding social distancing recommendations.
- 3) Churches with more sophisticated video capabilities could partner with [a smaller congregation](#) to ensure the smaller congregation also has access to high-quality sermon video.
- 4) Partnering with congregations and organizations experienced in working with underserved communities can boost your organizations' power to serve. Team with groups that serve the incarcerated, the homeless, migrant workers, immigrants and

refugees, and those with limited English proficiency. Work with local health officials to ensure these groups receive appropriate care and services.

- 5) Where there is minimal to moderate community transmission, consider working with the local health department, a local hospital, health care agency or service organization, such as the American Red Cross, to provide infection control training for your caregivers or home outreach workers.
- 6) Plan ways to continue essential services. Provide web- and mobile-based communications and services, and use livestream platforms such as **Facebook Live, if possible. Increase the use of email, conference calls, videoconferencing and web-based seminars.**

Online Streaming

Things to think about:

--What are the barriers for streaming? (Access, generational)

-- First ensure your members have broadband access. If they do not have internet it is a justice issue

- Teleconference for seniors (walk them through dial-in steps)
- ZOOM
- Microsoft Teams
- Facebook Live
- Google Hangouts/Meet
- RingCentral

Tithes & Offerings

Encourage members to continue tithes and/or offerings during this time, there are several ways you can give to the church:

- Mail – send check to the Church address
- Credit/debit Card payments

Other Giving Options

- CashApp
- Paypal
- Venmo
- Braintree
- Givelify
- Stripe

Safety Precautions

For everyone's safety and protection, we ask that you remain at home.

Things to consider: how important are church buildings to streaming? Functionality? (E.g. broadband access)

--Reimagining what is sacred space? (Can you stream from your home rather than the church building?)

But please remain at home if

- Are unwell or ill,
- Are caring for someone who is ill,
- Have a compromised immune system, or
- Have cold or flu symptoms.

The safety of our members, staffs, and visitors is our primary concern. We are taking the following precautions at our facilities. Some specific actions should include the following:

- **Providing hand sanitizer.** Place hand sanitizer stations at all building entrances. Have wall-mounted stations throughout our buildings' common areas as well as our classrooms and meeting spaces. Please use them when you are unable to wash your hands.
- **Disinfecting our buildings.** The surfaces within church facilities, including meeting rooms and classrooms, are cleaned and disinfected whenever used. For any public gatherings such as Bible study and our Sunday worship services (when allowed), all surfaces are cleaned both before and after the event.
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WHAT MEMBERS CAN DO

There are simple measures you can take to protect yourself and help us reduce the spread of Coronavirus in our community.

Stay at home, but if you need members at the church

- No physical touching
- Take advantage of our church sanitizing stations, particularly after sneezing, coughing and touching regularly used surfaces. We encourage members and guests to bring their own hand sanitizers as well
- Wash your hands often, particularly after using the restroom

In general:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth and others with unwashed hands.
- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water as often as you can. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- If you are not near a sink, use hand sanitizer. Sanitize all of the skin on your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Refrain from shaking your hands to dry them.
- Engage in respiratory etiquette by coughing and sneezing into the bend of your elbow.
- Sanitize freshly touched surfaces in your home, school or office daily.
- Avoid coming in close contact with those who appear unwell.

Educate yourself:

- Learn the additional measures that high risk, vulnerable individuals should take.
- Stay up on current events.

SUBMITTED BY THE COMMISSION ON CIVIC AND SOCIAL ACTIONS

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