



PREPARING FOR “SAFER AT HOME”

March 2020

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” – Psalm 91:1-2 (NRSV)

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WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

Our role as churches, leaders and compassionate Christians, is to:

- Combat fear with knowledge in order to encourage preparedness and decrease stigma
- Maintain operational continuity and continue expressions of Christian life in the case of quarantine and disruption
- Show God’s compassion and care to those in our communities who are affected

- Adapted from Episcopal Relief and Development¹

WHAT DO WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR?

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers is set to issue a “Safer at Home” order on Tuesday, March 23.² The specific language will not be released until Tuesday. Some general considerations to organize your planning:

- 1) Think about how you will reduce people’s chance of getting sick or dying from an epidemic.
- 2) Think about how your faith community will respond to needs of those who are sick, anxious, in economic need, and/or grieving with minimal or no person to person contact.
- 3) Think about how you will adapt your operations and respond to increasing levels of social disruption as the pandemic intensifies.
- 4) Think about how you will help the church and community cope with trauma.

¹ <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics/>

² <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2020/03/23/wisconsin-gov-tony-evers-issues-safer-place-order/2897821001/>

BACKGROUND

Our first and most basic goal is to reduce the chance of people becoming sick or dying from an epidemic. We are community partners with public health and medical professionals, and this is caring for our flock as much as prayer and preaching. We are part of a community effort to save lives.

These practices align with the recommendations of public health experts at this time. They do not account for specifics of Governor Evers' Executive Order, which will not be released until Tuesday. We are choosing not to focus on waiting for the specific wording of the order, but rather planning for our likely future, and working to honor the intent of such orders.

- The best practice recommended by health professionals is to stay isolated in immediate family/household groups, and to minimize trips outside of the household to essentials (food, medicine, medical appointments which can't be handled by telehealth). These should be grouped whenever possible - weekly or every other week grocery shopping, for example, done by the same person.
- Essential services are exempted: these are generally considered to be health care and emergency services, child care for health workers, the food supply chain, and infrastructure.
- With that in mind:
 - One goal of public health orders such as these is to drastically minimize interaction, opportunities to pass contagion between people and thus save lives.
 - Another goal is to minimize the number of people out and about. Fewer people on the streets means fewer potential car accidents, emergencies, etc. and thus fewer emergency personnel needed to tend to them. If we prevent accidents, that will be fewer beds needed for non-coronavirus emergencies.
 - As churches and Christians, wherever we have the ability to aid in these life-saving goals, we have a moral and ethical obligation to do so. This is about loving one's neighbor. We have other ways to provide the services we can provide, and to continue the essential operations of the church.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS AND PASTORAL SERVICES

- Model, in all you do, the behavior you wish your congregants to engage in to preserve physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health. Is it a priority for them to stay home? Show them through your ministry. You do not need to provide highly produced resources; most parishioners will simply be looking for a reassuring voices, faces, and words. Don't overdo it.
- All services, liturgies, etc that your church is currently providing should be adapted to be offered from home, remotely using technology (recorded, streamed, telephone, or mailed). The Council is curating resources to assist in this and is willing to provide some technical support and online space for groups to brainstorm. If you are aware of a resource you'd like to share, or if you'd like to set up technical support or a brainstorming opportunity, email wcoc@wichurches.org.
- All Christian education and formation should be provided remotely. Keep in mind that right now what people need more is access to familiar faces and voices as reassurance. We cannot assimilate information well when in crisis. Keep messages simple, short, and repetitive.
- All pastoral care, including care for those nearing death, and care for the grieving, should be provided remotely. We are developing resources for such times; if you would like to contribute to them, please be in touch.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCH BUSINESS

- Our recommendations acknowledge that this is a complex situation and there is no ideal answer, particularly for small organizations. As you work through the possibilities, acknowledge that going to the office would put someone at risk and potentially violate the law. Holding mail could cut off a much-needed income flow and delay bill payment. Having one person handle bills or income from a remote site compromises financial best practices. Whatever solutions you develop must accept the dilemmas and the risk. Build in additional checks and balances as you can to preserve the church's fiscal health as you guard the physical health of all concerned. Think very carefully about what constitutes "essential operations."
- **CHURCH MAIL:** Our best recommendation is to have your mail held at the post office. Depending on your cash flow needs, you can make arrangements to pick it up weekly or every two weeks. This eliminates the need for someone to be at the church office to wait for mail delivery. The overall goal of the items below will be to reduce the volume of paper mail you are handling and minimize the amount of time anyone will have to spend outside of their home to process paper.
- **BILL PAYMENT:** Make arrangements to pay any bills that you can, online. Write down accounts and login information and ensure more than one person has access to them in case of further disruption.
- **GIVING:** Convert as many of your givers as you can, to electronic giving.
 - If you do not have an electronic giving system set up, or some members are uncomfortable using the web, the bank should still be able to assist them in setting up an ACH payment.
 - If you are using an online system to track giving, write down login information and ensure more than one person has access.
 - If you have members who persist in writing paper checks, and a weekly trip to pick up held mail is not an option for you, you may have to consider other options such as asking members to mail checks to an alternate address. Be very careful if you do so – ensure a backup system so multiple sets of eyes review these deposits and offerings.
 - To reduce person to person interaction, consider downloading your bank's app and making deposits via app.
- **PERSONNEL RISK AND SANITATION:** Whether volunteer or staff - if you have someone come in to handle these items, be very cautious; ask them to sanitize before and after handling items in the church. Please don't ask someone in a high risk group to do these things if you have any other option.
- **CHURCH NEWSLETTERS:** Email, email email. For members without access to email, you may wish to have a church staff member print at home and mail a small number of newsletters out. If that is the case, have them keep track of supply use and ensure they are reimbursed by the church. Even better: have a fellow church member call them and read the newsletter to them!
- **DOCUMENTS:** Get any documents that you can into the cloud right away so they can be accessed offsite by multiple people if needed. Google Drive, OneDrive, and DropBox are all good options. If a server needs to be moved to an employee's home temporarily, be willing to make that shift.
- **PASSWORDS:** Get a copy of all passwords to multiple key people.
- **CONTINUITY:** Don't leave essential matters in the hands of ONE person. Have a handoff plan for all pending items.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO RIGHT NOW?

- Do what you can to minimize the need to go to the church building and secure it to be mostly unoccupied for a significant period of time.
- *If you operate a food pantry, services for unhoused people, or other direct services, this still holds! You want to minimize crossover between "clean" or sanitized parts of the building and those used by the general public.*
- Walk through the facility, pull down blinds, look for fire hazards, unplug extension cords, etc.
- If there is food in the refrigerator that will spoil, freeze it, bring it home, or donate it to someone in need.
- Take office plants home with you.
- Take potentially useful items home with you. Here's a list to consider (your thoughts may vary):
 - Vestments, stoles, altar cross, icons, candles, other items for creating sacred space when you are streaming or offering devotions at home
 - Prayer books, other books with devotional materials, hymnal or songbook
 - Any props you use regularly for a children's time which might offer a sense of comfort and familiarity to the little ones of the church; children's books
 - Notepaper, envelopes, stamps, basic office supplies so you can communicate with members
 - Cables and cords you might need for your computer
 - List of passwords you might have tucked into a drawer
 - Church directory!
- Take a photo or photos of stained glass windows, artwork, the chancel and other beloved areas of the church which you might share via email or social media over time as a comfort to the church. As an added bonus, some of these might serve as a videoconference or recording background for you!

A WORD TO THE WISE:

Don't be tempted to compete in the Online Ministry Olympics, in which we think we need to do it all, or be the best at something we've just learned. That is not the call. Bring yourself. Bring the sacred stories, old or new songs, earnest prayer. Speak true words. Bring the community together in spirit. Simplicity is enough. Trust that the Holy One will be in it with you, among you, and for you.