

A CONCISE
CORONAVIRUS
GUIDE
FOR
CHURCHES

INFORMATION
AND RESOURCES
TO HELP US LIVE
OUT OUR CALLING
DURING CRISIS.

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“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. . . . There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” **Mark 13:7-8**

Humanity has long worried for its own survival amid war, natural disaster, and disease. The escalating scare over the novel coronavirus COVID-19 feels to some like the end of the world. Jesus said, “such things must happen,” signaling an inevitability of disease and disaster in our world. As followers of Christ, we recognize this earth is not yet the new creation.

As churches, we are called to be harbingers of heaven in all of the ways we hold hope, keep faith, trust God, love our neighbors and enemies, and especially love the poor and the sick. We refuse to cave to fear, remembering always how “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18) and death has no sting (1 Cor. 15:55).

As for COVID-19, the latest predictions have it [shaping up as a pandemic](#), possibly on the scale of the global outbreak of influenza in 1957, though it may be more like the milder 2009 H1N1 outbreak. While much remains unknown, fatality totals are running much lower than for the seasonal flu (which has killed at least 18,000 people in the United States so far this season). According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 is [deadlier than the flu](#) based on current numbers, but does not transmit as easily.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY OFFERS THE FOLLOWING TIPS FOR CHURCHES

Trust God: Viral disease is a fact of biological existence and part of creation. Keeping perspective and not panicking apply here, just as they do for all risks we face as creatures in a finite world. No matter how dire circumstances get, the Lord remains our refuge and strength, “an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). To trust in the Lord amid trouble is to experience and bear witness to the power of Christ.

Pray: We must pray for the sick and the scared, for public health officials, for doctors and nurses, for researchers, and for caregivers. As Christians, we believe prayer has power, so we seek help from the Lord.

Heal the Sick: A core calling for Christians is to care for the sick and dying (Matt. 10:8), at times at the risk of our own lives (John 15:13). This is the epitome of love. Even if a virus outbreak prevents us from gathering as congregations to worship, we still support one another in our caregiving. This can happen through prayer, through verbal encouragement, and through coming alongside others to provide help in a crisis.

Stay Informed: The media is aflame with daily updates. Reading everything only increases anxiety. The following is a reliable list of links for educational, planning, and coping tools:

- **[CDC on COVID-19](#):** The US Center for Disease Control’s up-to-date resources on coronavirus.
- **[CDC Resources for Community and Faith-Based Organizations](#):** The CDC has also created resources specifically for faith-based organizations to respond to influenza pandemic, which are applicable in this situation.
- **[Managing Anxiety Around Coronavirus Coverage](#):** The American Psychological Association created this resource to help manage anxiety around coverage of COVID-19.
- **[Addressing Mental Health Issues](#):** This resource from the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Network provides guidelines for addressing mental health issues that may arise, and offers advice for messaging, including among children, older adults, people with disabilities, and those in quarantine.

Make Plans: Because COVID-19 likely spreads like the [cold and the flu](#), personal hygiene is paramount among staff, volunteers, and congregants (washing hands, avoiding contact with the sick, staying home if you’re sick, and so on). The CDC recommends hand sanitizer stations in public places, ample supplies of tissue, and disposable gloves for cleaning crews. The [CDC recommends](#) routinely cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in workplaces, restrooms, and nurseries, including workstations, countertops, doorknobs, and toys.

Churches may choose to adjust their own worship practices, gatherings, and daily routines to minimize spread as the virus extends its reach. Some considerations:

- 1. Identify a point person and form a response team now.** Church leaders should assign a staff leader or trusted volunteer now to take the lead in gathering information and tracking updates about COVID-19. This person also should lead a response team preferably consisting of one member of the pastoral team, a custodian or maintenance team member, a finance committee member, a communications/website team member, and a local health care professional. This team should form now and meet soon to assess the current situation and plan steps to implement the preventive measures and response plans discussed here.
- 2. Establish clear congregational communication.** Post [signs and flyers](#) encouraging hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette at entrances, in hallways, and in restrooms. Put announcements in print bulletins, e-newsletters, and on social media and websites with regular updates regarding changes in scheduled gatherings. Consider adding a page on the church website for frequently asked questions to keep members apprised.
- 3. Adjust worship practices and gatherings.** Should conditions warrant (for instance,

COVID-19 is reported in your state or local community), make changes to common church practices: Suspend “passing the peace” or greeting with handshakes during worship; consider single-serve communion, rather than common cups; and minimize food preparation and serving during coffee hours.

Depending on the severity of an outbreak, your church may need to cancel programming, small-group gatherings, or even worship services. Should your local or state health officials or a federal agency warn against public gatherings or advise congregations (or your congregation specifically) not to meet, take such advice seriously. Follow the guidelines and instructions provided.

- 4. Workplace practices.** Revisit policies on sick leave and absences, including [mandatory paid leave](#) in the event of a local outbreak. Employers should require individuals to be symptom-free before returning to work. This includes an orally taken temperature of less than 100.4 degrees for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication), and preferably includes completing a [CDC self-assessment](#) and consulting with a local physician. Leave should also be allowed for those who must care for sick family members.

In addition, in the event of a local outbreak, determine whether flexible work hours are possible for the church office to minimize the number of people in contact with each other throughout the day. Also consider instituting remote-work arrangements if the [information technology](#) and infrastructure can support it. In all of this, keep [labor and payroll law compliance](#) in mind, including [overtime pay rules](#).

Last, stay abreast of international outbreaks and determine travel accordingly. Check the CDC’s [geographic risk assessment](#) for global updates and planning. Some of the major church insurers offer [additional coverage](#) that assists with securing foreign medical care during out-of-country trips. Leaders should check with their insurance agents about the features and costs of this coverage before any trips.

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.

“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**

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RESOURCES

Stay updated on the coronavirus, the church's response, and the information and resources your church needs to make good decisions through the following websites and resources at Christianity Today:

- **[ChristianityToday.com](https://www.christianitytoday.com)**: For up-to-date developments on the spread of the virus and how church leaders are responding.
- **[CTPastors.com](https://www.ctpastors.com) and [PreachingToday.com](https://www.preachingtoday.com)**: Tips, insights, and resources for pastors needing assistance with teaching, leading, and ministering congregants and the surrounding community.
- **[ChurchLawAndTax.com](https://www.churchlawandtax.com)**: Information and guidance related to the legal and risk management considerations your church needs to make.