



COVID-19 Response | March 12, 2020

In response to the coronavirus pandemic that is spreading around the globe, we first want to ask you to **pray** for all who are affected by this disease. God be with those who are ill, isolated, afraid, or grieving the loss of a loved one. We offer our prayers of thanksgiving and protection for those involved in medical and emergency care who put at risk their personal health to serve and support others.

As Christ followers, we are not to be shaped by fear. We trust in “God with us” who often spoke these words of promise: **“Do not be afraid.”** *We are called to reassure others in this promise as they face the realities of sickness and death. This is a time to live wisely and with great compassion in our neighbourhoods and communities of faith.*

We wish to be responsible citizens and be informed of the risks and precautions associated with this pandemic. Our national, provincial and local government health authorities are our best source of that information.

On Wednesday, March 11, 2020 a teleconference was led by BC Premier John Horgan; Minister of Health, Adrian Dix; and Chief Medical Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry. There were 128 leaders of faith communities invited on to the call, one of whom was Rob Ogilvie. We recognize that there are many options that may be viable in your context. Below are some helpful guidelines and resources for you to consider implementing based on the information gathered from that call.

Stay Informed:

Get accurate and updated information:

British Columbia: BC Centre for Disease Control (<http://www.bccdc.ca/>)

Alberta: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16997.aspx>

Saskatchewan: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus>

Manitoba: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/>

Canada: Public Health Agency of Canada (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html>)

In recognizing that Covid-19 will eventually end (we just don't know when) a helpful question to ask is, **“Do I need to hold this event right now?”** If some gatherings can be delayed, it may be best to do so. If it does need to go ahead, find ways to allow people who are not feeling well and/or in a high-risk group to still participate by consider offering a virtual/live-stream option so they can still be involved in the life of your community.

Sunday Mornings:

- We want our facilities and services to be places that are safe for people to come. In addition to ensuring regular health safety measures are in place, offer freedom for people to not attend Sunday services and other church-sponsored group functions if they are not well.

- Develop a *communications strategy* or use existing communications methods and programs to instill hope in response to concerns about COVID-19, and to give regular updates from a centralized hub. Collaborate with other area churches in preparedness protocol and crisis prevention, as well as potential shared resourcing.

- Practice *Social Distancing Protocol*: No handshaking or hugging; stay 2 arm's lengths apart, especially for seniors; keep enough distance to stop droplets from transferring; wash hands with soap and water frequently; offer hand sanitizer to ushers, communion servers, pastoral staff and in the lobby of your church.

- Consider adapting how *offering* is received: online giving; e-transfer; snail mail; setup church as a payee with online banking or offer a centralized offering receptacle (i.e. have an usher stand at exit doors with offering plate to gather offering).

- Consider discontinuing serving *communion* for now or offering communion in an adapted format. Think about how many hands possibly touch the elements or serving dishes and consider using other methods (i.e. use tongs to serve bread).

- Adapt after-church *coffee times* to allow for social distancing and food-safe protocol by serving all refreshments by glove and tong and ensure proper sanitizing of all serving ware.

Opportunities to engage by serving the vulnerable, marginalized and under-served:

- Consider ways to mobilize those in a lower-risk category; help those at risk in picking up groceries, medicine prescriptions, laundry; visit via phone to help prevent social isolation; think creatively on how to combat social isolation of the elderly and those who may have compromised immune systems.

- Check with your local MP or community centres to see how you might be able to serve your community during this crisis and offer hope during a time shaped by fear. How might you be the hands and feet of Jesus right now?

We recognize that this is a fluid situation and encourage you to check the websites provided above for accurate and updated information as needed. Please check the cbwc website for regular updates on CBWC-sponsored events in the coming months.

Other helpful links:

CCCC (Canadian Council of Christian Charities)

https://www.cccc.org/news_blogs/noteworthy/2020/03/06/coronavirus-inform-prepare-your-organization/?ce=786BB2&cind=7on20200311150634orgAA251129AA737784

<https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf>