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I pastor a church near a COVID-19 outbreak. This is what churches can do.

MARCH 4, 2020 BY [UMJEREMY](#) — 44 COMMENTS



I pastor a church in Seattle, Washington, less than 20 mile drive from a **senior care facility in Kirkland** where the coronavirus (COVID-19) has claimed a half-dozen lives as of March 3, 2020. There are now reports of actively contained COVID-19 infected individuals in Seattle less than a mile away as well.

Needless to say, there is cause for prayer, bereavement care, but also **preparations for faith communities to continue to function amidst public health concerns—and indeed assist in the effort to contain this virus’ spread.** As a public service, this document was created to help churches decide how to respond before the virus reaches their ministry contexts.

On March 3rd 2020, **The Well @ Queen Anne United Methodist Church** brought together faith leaders in the Seattle downtown and suburbs to hear from King County Public Health officials. **Here’s what we learned**, with further information provided at the **King County Public Health here**, which is of particular interest to faith communities at this time.

Please note the following is an interpretation and application of the presentation and Q&A for local churches by pastors, **not** written by the Public Health department. **Contact them for direct assistance.**

General Information

How does COVID-19 spread?

Hacking Christianity is a community that engages in conversations about faith using the lenses of progressive theology, technology, and geek culture. [[Read More](#)]



COVID-19 is transmitted by **inhaling droplets from infected persons**. It is more like the flu, not like measles, meaning it does not sit in the air, it settles in droplets. Though droplets can be airborne at outset, transmission occurs when those droplets you touch are inhaled or ingested. Droplets can rest with active viruses on durable surfaces for hours or days, depending on the surface and environment.

In short, the concerns are:

1. Immediate vicinity of COVID-19 infected persons where droplets from coughs or sneezes or breath can be inhaled by other people.
2. Droplets from sneezes or coughs from infected persons on surfaces.

Symptoms incubation period is 2-14 days, so if you think you might be affected, stay home for 14 days along with any immediate members of your family.

Who is vulnerable to COVID-19?

Mild symptoms present for 80% of the population that has been exposed. At this time (March 4, 2020), the best research and case history shows that **people over 60 years of age and those with underlying medical issues are the most vulnerable**.

These are significant demographics in many of our faith communities!



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Church Best Practices

The following is a summary and application of recommendations received by the Public Health department from King County, Washington. **You can read up to date materials here**. Note these are not restrictions placed on churches by the State, they are what a group of pastors has considered to recommend to their own churches.

Should Churches continue to have worship services?

YES, churches should continue to have worship services and gatherings of all sizes. At this time, public health departments are not recommending discontinuation of public gatherings.

BUT members of vulnerable groups (those over 60 years old and those with underlying medical conditions) should evaluate whether participating in group activities in an enclosed space is worth the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Churches should communicate directly with vulnerable populations their support and encouragement to skip church if they are feeling sick or feeling vulnerable to getting sick.

Should Churches Offer Holy Communion?



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Rev. Jeremy Smith Retweeted



Jossie Valentin
@JossieValentin

These two are on @AOC's insta live rn. My heart is exploding.



4h

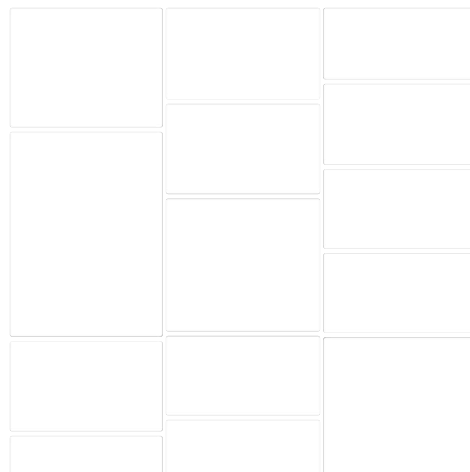


Rev. Jeremy Smith

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YES, BUT the common cup (intinction) is problematic because unclean fingers or breath droplets can get into the common liquid and potentially transmit or receive droplets of COVID-19. Even Catholic churches where the priest places the host on the person's tongue risks getting water droplets from breath on the priest's fingers, potentially infecting the succeeding folks. Additionally, putting bread cubes on trays and passing them down the aisles also allows for cross-contamination as people's hands reaching for the cubes are not clean.

INSTEAD churches should switch to individual cups that can be served without hand-to-hand transmission, meaning that receivers' hands should not touch cups other than their own. Church celebrants should practice how to hold the trays of individual cups.

Churches should take special care to disinfect tiny communion cups (they can be a pain – post your favorite way to clean them in the comments!) or to use single-use cups. If you go the latter route, consider paying a bit more money for **compostable cups like these** so you are better participants in creation care.

Finally, **celebrants should consider wearing gloves**. The Public Health official was not insistent that gloves must be worn, although she recommends that for food service. She allowed that a person with properly cleaned hands can offer bread safely as the communion host. But gloves would remove uncertainty, provided the celebrant keeps the gloves from cross-contamination.

See the next section for a recommended setup for cleaning hands before serving communion.

Should Churches offer Baptismal Remembrance fonts?

NO. Some churches have baptismal fonts at the entrance to the sanctuary or chapel so that congregants can dip their fingers in and place them on their foreheads to “remember their baptisms.” Because this is a common liquid that more than one person uses, it can potentially transmit COVID-19 droplets, so it should not be used by vulnerable populations.

Baptisms themselves can be done without transmitting droplets as long as none of the participants are infected.

Should Churches pass the peace?

YES BUT NOT BY SHAKING HANDS. Public Health officials recommend a distance of 4-6 feet from person to person in an enclosed space. That reduces the potential for sneezed or coughed droplets to transmit to someone else. Passing the peace by shaking hands not only violates that personal proximity line, but also has unclean hands touching each other.

INSTEAD, my church practiced “elbow taps” where we tapped elbows rather than shaking hands (though this is discouraged by **medical professionals in the comments below**, as people sneeze or cough into the inside of their elbows, so tapping the outside seems too risky). Bishop Stanovsky of the Greater Northwest region of The United Methodist Church **suggests the following**:

Maybe suggest a new gesture of greeting, like **folding your hands over your heart and then opening them palms out and down toward another person** — in a sign of connection, rather than palms out and up, which might indicate separation.

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Also, **Wakanda Forever** works just as well. 😊

Should Churches pass an offering plate?

NO, durable objects can retain droplets of active COVID-19 for hours or days, and certainly a few seconds while being passed down a pew or row of chairs. Even if ushers wiped them down with Chlorox wipes between each pew, the alcohol wouldn't have time to dry and it would still allow people to transmit germs down the row.

INSTEAD, I've seen churches (often in Africa or Brazil) that will sing and dance and place individual offerings in a stationary basket or plate. The people move, not the plates. Perhaps churches should consider a stationary placement of the offerings during, before, or after worship.

This would be **a great time to set up online giving**. And remind offering counters to not touch their face or mouth while counting, as the virus could still be active hours or a day later, depending on the environment.

Should Churches use hymnals?

YES, hymnals contain the words of the faith and encourage congregational singing. They should continue to be used.

BUT treat hymnals like doorknobs and disinfect your hands after use. Pick up the hymnal, sing the song or join in the liturgy, and then disinfect your hands before you touch your face or phone again.

Single-use bulletins are better than hymnals, but woefully a distant second due to environmental and congregational singing concerns. A better alternative is to project hymns on projectors/flatscreen TVs, rather than print more/longer bulletins and use more paper.



Church Environments

Here are some specific recommendations about church environments.

Setup for Communion Server Hand-Cleaning

Communion objects (plate, cups, etc) are disinfected and prepared with clean hands and food service best practices. But what about the servers themselves?

The Public Health Official said that **room-temperature water with soap is more effective than hand sanitizer**. They recommend the following setup for sanitizing the hands of communion servers and priests and celebrants:

1. A **pitcher and basin** (or an athletic event water dispenser with basin) to wet hands and to rinse soapy hands.
2. A **soap dispenser**, which the participants wash their hands for at least 20 seconds (two times through "Happy Birthday" or two verses of "Baby Shark" or the chorus of "Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson or "No Scrubs" by TLC are also acceptable...just not out loud on the altar)
3. **Paper towels** thrown in a trash, and then celebrant doesn't touch face or other durable objects other than the communion items.

A whole team of servers can get this done in about 2 minutes, perhaps during a hymn or a liturgy led by a non-celebrant. It doesn't have to add time to the worship service, but doing it in front of everyone will reassure people.

Cleaning

Bleach is recommended for disinfecting durable surfaces. Anything that causes bubbles destroys COVID-19. "If it suds, it strips."

Children's toys and other durable surfaces in classrooms or nurseries should be disinfected often. Toys with fur or fabric (stuffed animals, etc) should not be used during this season of COVID-19 concerns.

Clean your phone after church at the same time you wash your hands. We touch our phones a LOT.

Food Service

For coffee hour food service or potlucks, tongs or spoons should be made available so that the actual food is not contaminated by fingers in the food, with resting areas outside of the food for those tongs or utensils. But before you sit down and consume, you should wash or disinfect your hands. **Treat tongs like doorknobs**: use them, but wash your hands afterwards. Here's more **food service best practices** and consider posting volunteers to assist guests with best practices too.

Multi-Use Spaces

Do thorough cleaning between between uses of a multi-use space. If this is impossible, consider removing as many durable objects as possible in multi-use spaces so there are fewer surface areas to clean.

Staff Policies and Telecommuting Possibilities

Church Staff should pre-emptively figure out **how to accomplish as much of their jobs as possible remotely**. Install remote desktop software with secure practices, put documents (securely) in the cloud via Dropbox or OneDrive or Google Drive. Human Resource church committees should set expectations of what they want staff to do in case of feeling sick, fear of getting sick, or a potential shutdown so that as much ministry coordination as possible can happen remotely.



Church's Call to Mission

"It's important for mental health to not shut churches down. We are the only place many people have for community. We have to balance mental health and social service with safety. We can do best practices instead of shutting down." Rev. Katie Ladd, [The Well](#)

What biblical parallel is there for this coronavirus concern?

In Mark 6:30-44, Jesus and the Disciples find themselves in an unexpected situation. The crowds they tried to get away from to go find solitude and a place to eat have followed them. Jesus teaches them, and then tasks the Disciples with feeding them.

The Disciples feel bewildered by the unexpected command, and feel uneasy under the immense responsibility to care for these people. But Jesus tells them to bring what little food they have, and says it will be enough. **The disciples organize the people** into smaller groups of 50-100, distributed the food, and ended up feeding 5000 people with only a few loaves and dishes.

I believe the COVID-19 outbreak shows **we are in the gap between the unexpected responsibility and the organizing to share with each other.** It is a place of uncertainty, but knowing we are called to do something to share what we have can be a time of transformation and care for one another. Living in this gap between responsibility and an effective plan is a difficult place to be, but with Christ alongside us and Science informing us, it is possible.

Why should churches change their practices?

Churches are hesitant to change centuries-old practices, especially around rote rituals like Holy Communion. But the mission should inform our expressions. Churches, even in dechurched areas, are place where communities gather. If viruses can be stopped from transmitting in houses of worship and faith communities, then the church is doing its part to protect its membership. **Community norming of sanitary procedures would benefit all of us.** If we put into practice these things now, we can reduce its spread now and later.

If we ask people to stay home if sick or vulnerable, it minimizes risk. If we ask people to wash hands, it minimizes risk.

Even though the virus stops with us, the mission continues to be transmitted. That's our call to mission in times of contagion.

Your Turn

Update: If your church is closed due to coronavirus concerns, but you still want to livestream a worship service or sermon, [here's how we created this option in 3 days time](#).

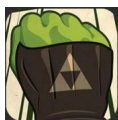
If there is advice above that does not agree with your informed opinions, please comment below and provide evidence (in the forms of public statements by public health departments or hospitals) that back up your opinion. **Only substantiated concerns will be used to revise this document.**

Thoughts?

Thanks for reading, commenting, and sharing on social media. You have permission to share or reprint it **with attribution**.

Filed Under: **Church Talk, Hospitality**

Tagged With: **Coronavirus**



Rev. Jeremy Smith is a United Methodist clergyperson who blogs about faith, technology, internet theory, and geeky topics. [Click here to learn more.](#)



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Comments

Kristin says

March 4, 2020 at 8:22 am

Jeremy – this is a great document that outlines the concerns and suggestions very well! I have two comments though – the first is about stopping the practice of passing the peace and in gathering but staying 4-6' apart. Recall that we gathered for this workshop and sat right next to one another, not 4-6' apart. My take on that comment is that if we are in close proximity that we take care to do it in a healthy manner, we don't sneeze or cough on one another and if we do need to sneeze or cough, we do it into a tissue. A good suggestion might be to have those in the pew pockets or on the chairs. Also, your answer to "should pass the peace" is "no" and I disagree. We should continue to pass peace to one another, just not pass the germs along with it. How about we clarify that when we greet each other and pass the peace, we do it without touching? Thanks for your work on this, it's super helpful!

Reply



UMJeremy says

March 4, 2020 at 8:27 am

Updated the second point to your suggestion. Thanks Kristin!

Reply

Linda Willey says

March 4, 2020 at 9:24 am

Thanks for the link to the cups. We receive weekly by intinction, but I purchased some because the virus has been found in our state. Now I just have to find a place that composts in my area!

Reply

Kat B. says

March 11, 2020 at 8:32 am

I'm so happy to help you out! We switched from intinction to trays towards the middle of 2019 because our space didn't allow for lines any longer (people literally couldn't get to a communion station because of the amount of people) – and we've been using compostable cups since we made the switch. It's hard to find a place that will take them, but I'm happy to help you research!

Reply

Ella Curry, PhD, RN says

March 4, 2020 at 10:12 am

Greetings, Jeremy.

Thank you for this comprehensive approach to questions and concerns that will face churches around the global church as we learn more about CoVID-19.

Regarding Passing the Peace:

At Dumbarton UMC in Washington, DC, we have adopted the American Sign Language expressions for "Peace" and "To You" as we walk around the sanctuary, speaking the traditional words as we offer the hand gestures. We actually started this practice when the numbers of flu cases heightened in our area; it is becoming an additionally thoughtful part of how we care for each other in this season of a new airborne virus.

One concern:

As an Infectious Diseases clinician for many years, I must add that I have concern about elbow bumps as a feature of Passing the Peace. Several years ago, at the time of another new airborne infectious pathogen, many people were trained to cough and sneeze into their bent arms. It has become reflex for many, particularly for those who routinely do not carry tissues. I see it in use every day.

While we do not yet know many of the clinical details about CoVID-19's lifespan, viability on surfaces, etc., I think it wise to avoid intentionally touching our elbows, many of which may have been in the direct line of viral droplet spray by those who

reflexively strive to protect others by capturing their coughs and sneezes in their bent arms.

Reply

Donna Cullen says

March 4, 2020 at 11:37 am

At a former church, we washed communion glasses in the metal serving tray topped by a plastic grate. One of our parishioners fashioned the grates from the material commonly found in fluorescent light fixtures. We sloshed the tray up and down in a sanitizing bath, rinsed in a similar way, and then flipped the tray of cups onto the grate to air dry. Once dry, the assembly was flipped for storing. On a particularly busy communion day, we changed the "baths" a time or two. Everyone involved wore single-use latex gloves. It was sanitary and quick. Not recommended for wooden serving trays. We shortened the built-in social time surrounding the washing of the cups but one can always extend the time together if desired.

Reply

Lori Doyle says

March 8, 2020 at 7:02 am

Great idea! Is there a way to post a pic of this tray you've fashioned?

Reply

Mike says

March 4, 2020 at 1:26 pm

Jeremy,

Considering potential worrisome respiratory symptoms, perhaps you might reconsider the name "Hacking Christianity."

Reply

Peter says

March 4, 2020 at 3:18 pm

I suggest Spewing Christianity as a good alternative...

Reply

Kim Shrader says

March 4, 2020 at 5:41 pm

Thank you for this comprehensive information. My comment is about the compostable communion cups. Most are made from corn and I have a severe corn allergy. Make sure people know that these are compostable cups and what they are made from. Have a few glass cups available just in case anyone like me is there. While corn is not one the top 7 allergens that food companies have to label, it is in the top 10.

Reply



Timothy Hankins says
March 5, 2020 at 6:57 pm

One note about best practices for Holy Communion. The doctrine of concomitance helps with concern regarding the cup. Because communion is complete in either the bread or the cup, those who are for any reason uncomfortable receiving the cup can receive only the bread and rest assured that they have received the full benefit, Grace, and presence of Jesus in Holy Communion.

Reply

Hannah says
March 5, 2020 at 5:02 am

This is very helpful. Thank you for sharing. Another option for cups would be small paper medicine cups — for some the smaller glass or compostable cups are hard to handle, and paper decomposes more readily if appropriate composting is not available.

Reply

Jerry N. Wesner says
March 5, 2020 at 6:28 am

How about making the words and music of hymns available by email or posting on line?

Reply

Pam Madaus says
March 5, 2020 at 4:58 pm

Then everyone can stare at their phones instead of a hymnal. That image makes me shutter.

Reply

Stephen Boyd says

March 5, 2020 at 5:20 pm

Just sayin', but if everybody over 60 (much less over 70) stayed home from my church, the remaining 13 adults will feel pretty lonely.

Reply

Arabelle Burns says

March 7, 2020 at 2:13 pm

Stephen,
you are the only person I have seen on here who has shown any sanity. I think everyone else has completely lost their minds. Are we really going to be walking around the sanctuary sanitizing objects and not breathing closer than 6 ft from anyone? are events going to be cancelled? hymnals no longer allowed? and those of us over 60 asked to stay home? Nothing like keeping things in perspective???

Reply

Theresa McRae says

March 11, 2020 at 4:22 pm

Perspectives may alter when people start dying. Then it will be too late.

I'm a stray UU – and a molecular biologist with a background in populations – looking for suggestions for our own congregation. I'm grateful for what I've found.

Reply

Dawn Beavan says

March 18, 2020 at 2:52 pm

I'm sorry but I have been looking and cannot find the above number that the congregation needs to be to stay open. I think I remember hearing 20 or above need to close. We have a congregation of 15-20 every Sunday. So where do I go to get a straight answer?

Reply



Timothy Hankins says

March 5, 2020 at 7:01 pm

One note about best practices for Holy Communion. The doctrine of concomitance helps with concern regarding the cup. Because communion is complete in either the

bread or the cup, those who are for any reason uncomfortable receiving the cup can receive only the bread and rest assured that they have received the full benefit, Grace, and presence of Jesus in Holy Communion.

Reply

Bruce Jones says

March 6, 2020 at 6:42 am

So what are the odds that General Conference and our Annual Conferences will have to be postponed?

Reply

Michael Cobb says

March 7, 2020 at 11:16 am

Good point. I'm wondering the same thing — if we are in a worldwide pandemic, do we want to gather? And if we postpone or cancel, what does that mean for the challenges at this juncture?

Reply

Arabelle Burns says

March 7, 2020 at 2:09 pm

I think everyone has gone off of the deep end! Once again the media has thrown the public into a panic. We did not all die from Avian Bird Flu, or SARS or Legionnaire's Disease or Swine Flu or any of the others. Approx. 12,000 Americans die each year from the flu. If even 1,200 died from coronavirus, this country would be thrown into complete panic Where has reason gone? This is insane. God help us.

Reply

THERESA MCRAE says

March 11, 2020 at 4:39 pm

Almost half a million people in this epidemic are predicted to die in the US – at least in a presentation of the American Hospital Association. They used a CFR (Case Fatality Rate) of 0.5. We now believe the CFR is a bit under 3.0. You can do the math.

The current CFR for those over 80 is 14.8%. The CFR for those between 70 and 79 is 8%. The CFR for those between 60 and 69 is 3.6%. Take the number of parishioners in your congregation, multiply by a 30%-40% likelihood that they will be infected, and then multiply that by the CFR we currently see, and you can see how many parishioners you are likely to lose in each age group.

Part of the reason that the death toll is expected to be so high is that we have only 330,000 open hospital beds. If and when we have that many

people sick, people are going to die from lack of healthcare, including those who don't have COVID-19 but need to be in hospital. We're better than China at treating COVID-19 patients now, but that will change when there are no more beds.

These numbers are extremely wobbly, and change every day – seldom for the better. We just don't know enough about this virus to make good predictions. It is also unclear whether or not this country can organize an effective response the way that China – eventually did.

Finally, the main reason that the mortality for the diseases you mentioned didn't reach these astronomical levels is that there was an effective, world-wide government response. I don't see that happening now – at least not yet. I'm still hopeful.

As people of faith, we have to take on the social responsibility, to do our share, to keep these terrible numbers from coming true.

Reply

Sharon says

March 11, 2020 at 7:06 pm

Great commentary and I have learned a lot. Our church is putting together a task force to develop a plan of strategies.

Reply

David says

March 7, 2020 at 4:15 pm

Your PCUSA neighbors have cancelled worship until further notice.

<https://pres-outlook.org/2020/03/as-covid-19-cases-increase-seattle-presbytery-asks-churches-to-cancel-worship/>

I hope your less-drastic preventive measures work.

Reply

Aeri Lee says

March 7, 2020 at 10:27 pm

Regarding communion cup disinfection:

I'm a music teacher and have to disinfect the mouthpieces for 30 of my students' recorders after each class. I soak them in a 3% peroxide solution, then wipe them dry, per manufacturer instructions. The same method should work for those individual communion cups.

Reply

Rev Dr. S. A. Wozencraft says

March 8, 2020 at 7:34 am

Two comments: regarding celebrants and hand washing, singing the doxology at a normal speed takes about as much time as Happy Birthday twice or the Alphabet Song ... and is more appropriate for the setting should one (accidentally) sing aloud!

As for projecting material onto a screen, this is an accessibility issue. I live with a chronic medical condition that makes it difficult for my eyes to change the distance at which I focus. Unless that projected material is in quite large and dark type (and it seldom is), it can take as long as 15 minutes of my staring at the screen before it comes into focus and then only if the image has not changed. If everything is projected onto that screen in the usual fonts, you would be shutting me and others like me out of most of the worship service. I have all but quit going to a nearby UMC where my family worships for this reason and the fact that the pastor is aware of this and still uses the screen exclusively (no printed bulletin).

Reply

Aimee says

March 9, 2020 at 10:31 am

Hands should be washed and dried before putting on gloves or you will have contaminated them before using them.

Also if you have band-aid on, you will need to wear gloves.

Reply

John Taylor says

March 9, 2020 at 6:40 pm

For more than half my ministry the churches I pastored used the metal trays and washed the small cups following worship. At 84 I am still upright and no one died at the altar! The communion stewards "fussed" about the washing! Cokesbury used to offer a "gadget" that held a tray of the cups for washing and rinsing; drainboards and counters can be easily cleaned as per CDC instructions. Some "old" practices are still doable and useful (likewise "seniors").

Suggestions for Protestants!!!!

Reply

Rev. Robert E. Costello says

March 10, 2020 at 8:38 am

Many of us have survived both intinction and the small glass cups that have been washed.

A much simpler and surely more guaranteed approach is to simply use disposable plastic communion cups. They are readily available through any church supply outlet.

Reply

Bthomas says

March 13, 2020 at 6:20 am

Have used the small disposable plastic communion cups in multiple churches for many years with complete success. Ideal way to both avoid the spread of contagion and at the same time not unnecessarily delay preparations for the next service by having to wash, dry and refill glass cups.

Reply

Rev. Le Anne Clausen de Montes says

March 10, 2020 at 1:48 pm

My understanding from our public health officials is that this virus can only survive on surfaces for about an hour. Yes, disinfect as much as possible, but unless your church has multiple services on the same day, it may not be so worrisome to use the hymnals. Our local hospital protocol for housekeeping says to disinfect the patient room and keep it out of circulation for two hours as a best practice.

I have often found that seniors are the ones most likely to venture out when they ought not, out of a sense of religious duty (especially true in wintry weather). We tend to cancel services more often for this reason here in Iowa.

Reply

THERESA MCRAE says

March 11, 2020 at 4:47 pm

The survival of COVID-19 has NOT yet been established. Two closely-related viruses can survive anywhere from a few hours to as long as nine days, depending on the strain of that virus, the temperature, and the surface.

Reply

David says

March 12, 2020 at 6:26 am

"March 11 (UPI) — According to new research, the novel coronavirus can remain in the air for up to 3 hours and survive on some surfaces for two to three days.

The research, which was carried out by scientists from the National Institutes of Health, Princeton University and UCLA, suggests it's possible for the virus to spread through the air as well as through the touching of contaminated surfaces."

https://www.upi.com/Science_News/2020/03/11/Coronavirus-can-live-in-air-for-3-hours-on-surfaces-for-2-3-days/8121583963038/?ur3=1

The article contains a link to the original research paper, if anyone wants that level of detail.

Reply

Rev. Le Anne Clausen de Montes says
March 13, 2020 at 6:32 am

Thank you for the update! I was just coming here to make the changes to my comment in light of the new information. The packet I received from public health came out last weekend (3/6/20), and was already outdated.

In light of the information available as of 6PM Thursday 3/12/20 have recommended that all congregations in Iowa suspend in-person worship and other gatherings starting this weekend and continuing for at least two weeks while we monitor public health information. Most of our congregations are not equipped to maintain the primary recommendations of maintaining 6 foot social distance among participants, not sharing/ passing items among the group, and sanitizing all surfaces. In addition, most of our congregations are largely comprised of the highest-risk groups of people for serious complications or death: adults over 60, and those with medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma/ lung conditions, or other immune-compromising conditions.

I agree there are many ways to be a community without being together physically, and love many of the recommendations here for phone trees, online prayer circles (video or chat/ text-based)

Also, here is a great resource from my county public health department for helping households prepare for quarantine—and it can also be used for assembling food/ supply ‘doorstep delivery’ boxes for those who can’t leave their homes over the next month:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15jzChdZzjta0Z89mNpHtW5JCQBvNx4E6/view?usp=sharing>

Reply

David says
March 13, 2020 at 12:22 pm

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, of the Baltimore-Washington conference, has also requested that churches not meet in the next two weeks.

<https://www.bwcmc.org/news-and-views/urgent-letter-from-bishop-easterling-on-covid-19/>

Reply

Mark Rich says

March 12, 2020 at 12:24 am

I think that setting up a system of daily phone calling by members would be very helpful at this time. Each call could include a health check-in, a question about preparedness, and a prayer. Our members could also extend this to other people they know who may not belong to a church but who could benefit from a daily check-in. This basic level of caring for each other is and should be one of the hallmarks of Christian community.

Reply

Mimi Goodwin says

March 12, 2020 at 7:30 am

Greetings, thank you for this detailed, clear and practical information! Another action to take is to be communicating about action plans of church with all groups renting space in building.

Reply

Holly Boardman says

March 13, 2020 at 9:28 am

https://www.christianbook.com/celebration-wafer-juice-sets-box-250/pd/553262?en=google&event=SHOP&kw=church-supplies-40-60%7C553262&p=1179710&dv=c&gclid=Cj0KCQjw3qzzBRDnARIsAECmryp71MPvmUITM7gX2IDka7NVZy4HEQx9IRyREjb3nSjqlQ3U869Q3_L

Reply

michael anderson says

March 15, 2020 at 1:53 am

When a decision is made to close a church I think it shows a lack of faith in God. When we receive the word of Christ every Sunday, there is always mention of having faith in Christ in all we do. Do the clergy feel that closing the church is what God wants? I think that if Jesus was here right now, he would be very disappointed by the number of churches being closed out of fear of this virus. Some say it is out of love that they close the church, I say that they are driven by Satan to cause the most havoc and confusion in the church because they have that power, I feel that clergymen and women all over the U.S. should go back and re-evaluate their position.

Reply

Will says

March 15, 2020 at 4:32 am

I agree entirely. And I am especially angry about the wholesale government-enforced shutdown of churches in Italy, which along with the ageist decision

to refuse ICU care to anyone infected who is over 80, is surely illegal under the ECHR. Except, of course, unlike our First Amendment, the ECHR permits "derogation" in times of war, which greatly reduces its value as a guarantee of civil liberties.

Reply

Will says

March 15, 2020 at 4:28 am

In general, these are good ideas, except for the suggestions concerning the distribution of Holy Communion, and the presence of fonts of Holy Water. As the Eucharist becomes, according to the Eucharistic Prayer in the United Methodist Book of Worship, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot possibly harm the faithful, which is why Orthodox parishes are continuing to serve the Eucharist with intinction, from a common chalice, either using a spoon in the case of Russian, Greek and other Eastern Orthodox parishes, or by placing it on the tongue in the case of the Syriac Orthodox Church (Western US Diocese). And for that matter, parishioners in traditional Latin Mass communities (by which I mean diocesan Tridentine masses, and not schismatic SSPX chapels) in the US are continuing to receive the consecrated host on the tongue rather than in the hand, for reasons of piety, and no ill has come of it. The Eucharist in the Orthodox tradition is intincted in wine mixed just before serving with boiling hot water, which also has an antiseptic quality.

Regarding the holy water font, this is also blessed, but furthermore, it would in my view be completely acceptable to add ethanol or other disinfectant substances into the font (in addition to the salt they are traditionally sprinkled with).

This document shows what Eastern Orthodox churches in the United States are doing, and in my opinion, this represents the ideal approach with regards to the handling of the Eucharist: <https://mailchi.mp/e6e04de1c036/lent-2020-1347781>

For somewhat unfortunate historical reasons relating to alcohol abuse in 18th century Britain, many Methodist churches do not, sadly, use wine when serving communion, but even then, if we do believe what the Eucharistic prayer says, the Blood of our Lord can't possibly hurt us.

Reply

Stephen Patrick says

March 19, 2020 at 5:20 am

Our church is wanting to sanitize pews as well as other used objects in our sanctuary what is the best cleaning solution to use on wooden pew backs and armrests all of us "old" people have to use the pew backs to help us get up and down. Is there something you can recommend that we do. We tried using those Clorox wipes but they seem to be taking the stain out of the wood. Suggestions?

Reply

Rev. Julia E F Poulsen says
March 26, 2020 at 10:49 am

Loaves and dishes. HAHHAHAHA

I think you meant loaves and fishes.

Thanks for the chuckle.

Reply

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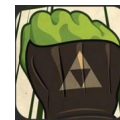
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