

### COVID-19 UPDATE March 14, 2020

Team Florida pastors, I've been praying for you this week as you've been working with your church leaders to make decisions regarding your congregation's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

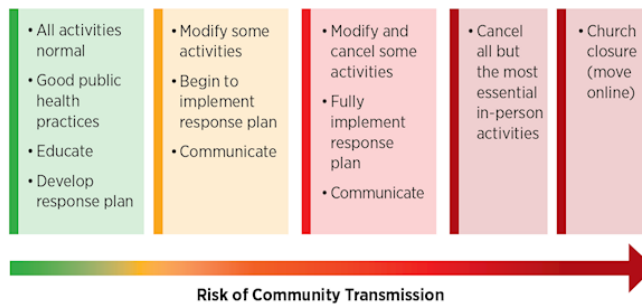
In this week's Three Thought Thursday, I sent a number of resources designed to help your congregation plan their response. Many pastors have found them to be helpful, and if you haven't yet reviewed them, I'd encourage you to do so.

I remind you that the decision as to how you navigate this season is ultimately a decision for your local congregational leadership to make, but there are some basic guidelines that I'd encourage you to consider.

#### 1. Know the current risk within your community.

### What's My Church's Level of Risk?

- There are no cases in my community.
- There are cases in my community, but:  
Cases are all imported from another area or are contacts to an imported case.
- There are one or more cases, and they do not have contact to a known case.  
Multiple generations of transmission.



#### 2. Put appropriate modifications in place to limit the potential spread of COVID-19.

## A Framework for Planning Church Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

ACTIVITIES	HOW TRANSMISSION COULD BE FACILITATED	RISK LEVEL	MODIFICATIONS TO REDUCE RISK	OPTIONS TO SUBSTITUTE	SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS
Worship service		Moderate to High	Disinfect high-contact areas before worship.	Livestream online service.	May recommend that the elderly and those with chronic illness do not attend because of greater severity of illness if infected.
Singing during worship	A person singing generates respiratory droplets, which land on people close by.	Moderate	Space out worshippers to six feet, keeping families or friends together; use every other row of seating.		
Greeting time	Hand-shaking or hugging directly passes viruses from person to person.	High	Don't shake hands or hug but still greet each other.		
Offering	A person touching an offering plate with virus on it can get the virus on their hands.	Moderate	Use offering box; have usher bring offering plate to congregation or collect offering when people leave.	Use mobile or online payment.	
Communion	A person touching a communion plate with virus on it can get the virus on their hands.	Moderate	Set up stations for people to receive and collect communion element. Disinfect offering trays.		
Sunday school (elementary school/ kindergarden)	Young children may have activities with frequent touching of same objects and have lots of contact with each other.	Moderate to High	Modify activities to minimize touching of same objects. Disinfect room between use.		Need to educate parents not to bring kids with even minor symptoms. Children may have mild illness but could transmit to adults.
Fellowship groups meeting in homes (primarily adults, with or without children)	A person generates respiratory droplets or participants infected through direct or indirect touching of objects, such as dishes.	Moderate	Plan to sit around tables or lecture style, which lowers risk. Avoid huddling. Eliminate high-touch interaction. Skip meals. Keep children home. Reduce size of group by splitting into more home groups.	Use online platform for small group interaction and prayer.	Groups in home settings tend to be smaller and people know each other so they are more able to keep sick people away. Groups with children pose greater risk. Elderly participants or those with chronic illness have greater risk.
Retreats (with overnight stay)	Groups of people together for extended period, including singing, talking, eating, and living together, all in close proximity to each other, is risky.	Very High			It's difficult to reduce risk because of the length and closeness of interaction.

### 3. If you choose to hold services or events, follow protocols from the CDC, including but not limited to:

\* **Washing and sanitizing hands:** Maintain good personal hygiene by washing hands often using soap and water. Hand sanitizer may also be used, and made available at multiple locations throughout your facility.

\* **Avoiding physical contact:** Avoid shaking hands, hugging, kissing, and other forms of physical greeting. Practice bowing, waving, or other forms of recognizing and honoring others.

\* **Sanitizing between services:** Sanitize surfaces thoroughly before and after use, especially door handles, tables, and chairs.

\* **Create additional space between people in worship:** Have people sit at least 5 feet apart from each other to limit the potential for viruses being spread.

\* **Prop or hold open doors:** Have greeters hold doors open or prop doors open so that people do not have to touch the door handle as they enter and exit your building.

\* **Don't pass an offering plate:** Instead of passing an offering plate, receive offerings as people leave, have people bring offerings forward, or encourage electronic giving.

\* **If you celebrate communion, ensure hygienic distribution:** If your church continues serving Communion, consider the following precautions. The elements should be individualized when possible. The practice of "intinction" (dipping the bread into the juice), using the "tear and share" method of distributing bread, and sharing a communal cup should be avoided. Instead, churches may use pre-packed Communion cups or prepare individual servings. Anyone who handles food should thoroughly wash their hands or wear protective gloves.

\* **Encourage people who have illnesses or have been around people who are ill to avoid gatherings.**

\* **Provide online worship options:** If you do not already have an online church platform, utilize Facebook live or YouTube live to broadcast your worship gathering to those who choose not to join you in person.

#### 4. If you choose to cancel services.

\* **Communicate with clarity:** Send update emails, communicate on your congregation's social media pages, and enlist congregational leaders to assist with communication.

\* **Provide online worship options:** If you do not already have an online church platform, utilize Facebook live or YouTube live to broadcast your worship gathering to those who choose not to join you in person. Consider how you can include worship through song, prayer, giving, and the preaching of the word in this time of worship.

\* **Remember the church is more than our weekly gathering:** We are the church when we gather, but we are also the church when we are scattered. Find ways to equip and encourage the scattered church to minister to those in need in this time of uncertainty.

\* **Create a congregational care plan for checking in with your congregation, especially the most vulnerable within your community.**

#### 5. For all congregations.

\* Although many people will be avoiding gatherings, special events, and working from home, there are still opportunities to care for one another and demonstrate Christ's love.

\* Pray for those who are affected by this virus - those who are ill, the medical professionals treating them, and the leaders making tough decisions to try and limit the spread of the virus.

\* Reach out to anyone you think might be feeling isolated over the next few weeks, give special attention to loved ones and friends who have mental health concerns or who live alone.

\* Educate yourself about the Coronavirus from authoritative sources, such as from the World Health Organization and the CDC. Know the symptoms and have a plan for what you would do if you or a family member were to become sick.

\* As the virus spreads, many doctors and nurses will be working long hours. Consider ways you can bless these medical professionals with acts of kindness and notes of appreciation.

\* Because of the number of events being canceled, many in your community will be without work and without paychecks, this is an opportunity for the church to extend compassion. Consider encouraging those who have resource to share those resources. Evaluate your church budget and consider cutting expenses and reallocating a percentage of those funds towards compassionate ministries.

\* Finally, not allow fear to find a foothold. Over 100 times the Bible tells us, "Don't be afraid."

I love what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 56:3-4, where David shares his strategy for overcoming fear,

*When I am afraid,  
I put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust; I am not afraid.*

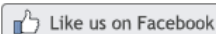
Pastors, let's lead well, let's care for others well, and let's trust that our faithful God will help us as we seek to fulfill the ministry to which we have been called.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Dale

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