

In the event of a widespread communicable disease, it is necessary for churches to be as proactive as possible in addressing the threat with a heart towards ministry, but also an organized and strategic plan. Below is an overview of a sample plan you may wish to implement or modify to your church's needs.

Develop Your Team:

Your first step as a pastor or church leader is to create a leadership team that will help you make pertinent decisions, develop the strategy, and communicate to your parishioners. This may include additional staff, deacons, security or even missions team members or Children/Preschool leaders. Once you have created this team, consider the following as a potential road map for developing your policies.

3 LEVELS OF RESPONSE:

- Level 1: Caution
- Level 2: Warning
- Level 3: Severe

EACH LEVEL SHOULD INCLUDE THESE FIVE AREAS:

- **Communication**

Questions you should ask:

- How will levels be determined? Who determines? (Pastor, Pastoral Staff, Leadership team), Outside agencies may dictate levels (Center for Disease Control, , US Department of Health and Human Services, Arkansas Department of Health, County Health Department)
- How will you communicate the response plan? How will you communicate the current level of response? (ex. Social Media, Web page, Phone tree, Text messaging, etc.)
- Who will communicate? This should come from ONE source (ex. Pastor, leadership team)

- **Prayer**

- Remind members that prayer is always our first response.
- Develop prayer teams and strategy for contacting those who must miss church gatherings due to symptoms/illness and/or if gatherings are cancelled.

- **Gatherings/Attendance**

- Communicate schedule of gatherings at each level.
- Communicable disease is spread as people gather in large groups
- Limiting the number of gatherings and/or cancelling services may be necessary.

- Those most susceptible to virus are elderly and those with existing health conditions. Elderly are the ones who are most likely to attend. Encourage members who are symptomatic to stay home and consult their physician. Additional encouragement may be needed at Level 2 for elderly and those with health conditions to remain home.
- Provide increased level of ministry support – via phone – to those who are elderly and those who are symptomatic.
- Should gatherings be suspended, have a plan for providing worship service/Bible study through video posted on website or social media page.
- **Ministry**
 - Communicate how ministry will occur at each level.
 - Encourage non-touch ways of greeting: “God bless you.” “I love you.” “Good morning.” Wave. Smile. Discourage handshaking and hugging.
 - Encourage washing hands with hot water/soap for 20 seconds, utilizing sanitation stations provided. Children – no sense of time; sing “Jesus Loves Me” or the 2x through “ABC”.
 - Provide sanitation stations throughout the church campus: alcohol based (60% or greater), wipes, etc.
 - Dismiss SS 5 minutes early for hand-washing.
 - More detailed cleaning/sanitizing of hard surfaces on church campus (rails, doors, handles, wood/metal surfaces). Refill hand sanitizer/soap dispensers prior to gatherings.
 - Communicate how members request pastoral care, inform pastors of those affected, etc. at each level.
- **Giving**
 - Communicate how giving will take place at each level.

The following pages break down some of the previous suggestions for each area of concern at each level of response.

LEVEL 1: CAUTION

COMMUNICATION:

- The Pastor/Leadership Team will announce Level 1 response through means agreed upon.

PRAYER:

- Prayer is always our first response. Remind membership that a team is praying for those who are affected. Team member regularly calls those who are absent/affected.

GATHERINGS:

- No disruption of regular schedule.
- Those who are symptomatic are encouraged to stay home and consult their physician.

MINISTRY:

- Refrain from hugging and shaking hands. Greet one another with “Hello”, “God bless you,” wave.
- Encourage attenders to wash hands and visit sanitation stations located throughout church campus. CDC – hand sanitizers should be at least 60% alcohol based; non-alcohol based sanitizers are better than nothing, but ineffective in killing the Coronavirus.
- Members with non-medical care needs beyond what is provided by family may contact the church office or pastor. Members are encouraged to contact the church office or pastor regarding those who are symptomatic. The pastor, a deacon, or member of the prayer team will contact those affected via phone for prayer.

GIVING:

- Tithes and offerings will be received in regular manner (traditional giving through SS or worship, online, mail, etc)
- Keep in mind the possibility of transmission using the offering plates. These should also be sanitized.

LEVEL 2: WARNING

COMMUNICATION:

- Pastor will announce Level 2 response through agreed upon methods when a sizeable segment of the population has been infected.

PRAYER:

- Prayer is always our first response. Remind membership that a team is praying for those who are affected. Team member regularly calls those who are absent/affected.

GATHERINGS/ATTENDANCE:

- Sunday morning worship only. All other gatherings are suspended.
- If you are symptomatic you are urged to stay home and consult with your physician. Elderly and those with health conditions are encouraged to remain home.
- For those who choose to stay home (elderly, health conditions, symptomatic) provide live feed of worship service.

MINISTRY:

- Same as Level 1.

GIVING:

- Tithes/offerings will be received during morning worship and other approved methods (traditional mail, electronic, direct deposit, etc.)
- If you are unable to attend, tithes/offerings are encouraged through traditional mail or online (provide link).

LEVEL 3: SEVERE

COMMUNICATION:

- Pastor will announce Level 3 response (through agreed upon methods of communication, list methods) when a pandemic reaches our local area. All public gatherings including worship, Bible study and ministry groups will be suspended.

PRAYER

- Prayer is always our first response. Remind membership that a team is praying for those who are affected. Team member regularly calls those who are absent/affected.

GATHERINGS/ATTENDANCE:

- All public gatherings will be suspended.
- In substitute for public gatherings, a weekly message from the pastor will be provided (where, when, link). If a weekly SS lesson/Bible Study is posted, share where & when available.

MINISTRY:

- Ministry will be conducted on the phone and through other electronic means. Members with non-medical care needs beyond what is provided by family may contact the church office or pastor. Members are encouraged to contact the church office or pastor regarding those who are symptomatic. The pastor, a deacon, or member of the prayer team will contact those affected via phone for prayer.

GIVING:

- All members are strongly encouraged to give tithes/offerings online (link) or through traditional mail.

RESOURCES

- Suggested Response Plan – This is a general overview, allowing churches to provide specifics
- Visit the ABSC website and social media platforms for updates
- List of important links for current information
 - www.imb.org (Protocols for volunteer mission trips)
 - www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
 - www.travel.state.gov (US Department of State)
 - www.who.int (World Health Organization)
 - www.hhs.gov (US Department of Health and Human Services)
 - www.healthylarkansas.gov (Arkansas Department of Health)
 - Check with your county's health department