

Trinity Presbytery's Response to the Spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)



As we seek to be obedient to God, there may be times when we find ourselves in the midst of situations that can be detrimental to our own health and safety. In times such as this, Jesus admonishes us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). Navigating our way through this current coronavirus pandemic environment requires that all of us exercise wisdom.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control regularly updates the public on positive cases of COVID-19 in the state. As of this morning, Tuesday, March 17, 2020, here are the results:

COVID-19 Monitoring & Testing in SC

Negative tests	311
Positive tests	33
Deaths	1

Due to the rapid spread of the coronavirus, on Sunday, March 15, 2020, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster publicly announced that he was temporarily closing schools across the state. The following morning, March 16, 2020, the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) reported the first COVID-19 death in South Carolina. The person who died was an elderly man who had been living in a Lexington Medical Center Extended Care Facility.

In an effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the [White House Coronavirus Taskforce](#) issued a set of new guidelines, today. The new guidelines, in part, advise all Americans to avoid social gatherings in groups more than 10 people for the next 15 days.

Your Presbytery Coordinating Team has met to consider how best to help navigate our member congregations through these turbulent uncharted waters that the COVID-19 virus presents. We recognize that continuing, modifying or canceling in-person worship services is a decision to be determined by the session of each of our member congregations.

We also recognize that this virus has no cure, leaving everyone susceptible. While our faith assures us that God is the healer of all our diseases (Exodus 15:26; Psalms 103:3), our love of neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40) strongly suggests that we do our part to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Therefore, in an effort to act wisely and help mitigate the potential spread of the coronavirus to relatives, friends, associates and neighbors, the Presbytery Coordinating Team of Trinity Presbytery:

- 1. Encourages all sessions to review and comply with the guidelines set forth by the White House Coronavirus Taskforce.**

In an all out effort to combat the spread of this virus, the [White House Coronavirus Taskforce](#) is recommending that for the next 15 days all Americans, including the young and healthy, work to engage

in schooling from home when possible. Avoid gathering in groups of more than 10 people. Avoid discretionary travel. And avoid eating and drinking at bars, restaurants, and public food courts. Therefore, we strongly encourage all sessions to review and comply with the guidelines established by the [White House Coronavirus Taskforce](#).

2. Encourages sessions that consider the recommendations of the White House Coronavirus Taskforce too stringent to at least consider cutting down on in-person meetings.

Tricia Dykers Koenig, the Associate Director for Mid Council Relations, Office of the General Assembly, in her article entitled, *“Being church when you can’t be together in person, and more...”* provides the following tips and questions for sessions considering cutting down on in-person meetings in response to the coronavirus.

A. Tips for Sessions to Consider

- 1) **Check your contact list and communications.** Verify that you have current contact information for all members and regular attendees at your church. Go over the protocol for communicating the cancellation of worship or other events to these persons and the broader public. Even smaller congregations that depend on family networks may want to make sure that everyone has a “buddy” who is not part of their own family.
- 2) **Make sure you have remote and shared access to key information.** Put critical electronic files in cloud-based storage so key leaders can access information from home. Know how to access the church’s voicemail system or answering machine remotely in case important messages are left there or you need to update the recording to reflect a cancellation or closure. Set up an electronic distribution list through a database or distribution service (i.e. Constant Contact or Mailchimp) so that access is not limited to a single person.
- 3) **Consider electronic conferencing options to keep people connected.** The church’s ministry does not have to stop if in-person gatherings have to be canceled for health and safety reasons. Explore ways of gathering for worship, prayer, and/or Bible study via conferencing technology like RingCentral or Zoom (videoconferences) or FreeConferenceCall. These have the added benefit of providing options for bringing people together in our increasingly complex lifestyles.
- 4) **Set up giving online.** Contributions to the church can continue even when worship is canceled or attendance diminished through any of several online giving options. Look for a service that integrates with your church’s database software or consider the [Presbyterian Foundation’s Online Giving Program](#), which offers low transaction fees, then encourage members to establish automatic recurring gifts.
- 5) **Adopt rules for electronic meetings.** Sessions and other church committees can meet electronically via videoconference or teleconference if the church has adopted appropriate procedures for such in advance. Make sure your session’s manual of operations includes these provisions *before* you need to use them, even if you don’t have the technology yet!

B. Discussion Questions for Sessions to Answer

- 1) **How will you continue to include those who are ill or afraid or following the recommendations or requirements of governmental officials in worship and other spiritual practices of your congregation?** Do you have a way to produce a video of worship? Are you on Facebook live? Do you post your worship services to YouTube? Does your pastor post the sermon or prayers? This

is a good time to increase your online presence so that all of your members and friends can stay connected to your group spiritual practices over the next weeks and months.

- 2) **Have you considered holding smaller events as Zoom meetings or by RingCentral, or Skype or Facetime?** For instance, do you have a Bible study that meets regularly? If it becomes important for people not to meet in person, have you helped them find a way to continue that practice electronically?
- 3) **What about pastoral care?** This is the time to remind your deacons, elders, Stephen's Ministers, and staff that they should not make pastoral visits if they are themselves feeling unwell. This is also a time to think about how to help people feel the care offered by your congregation without physical contact; do you have a robust ministry of sending written notes, making phone calls, and contacting your shut-in or ill members or those experiencing loss by electronic means?
- 4) **Do you have a way for members to make contributions electronically?** The best way to do that is to have people set up electronic funds transfer so that their contributions are made on a regular basis. (Your bank or the Presbyterian Foundation can help you with this.) Is there a place on your website where people can make an online contribution? Can people contribute by text? This is the time to improve all of these systems for your congregation.
- 5) **How will you get people back?** Perhaps the most important thing your leaders can be doing now is planning about how you will get people back. For the next few weeks or even months, it is likely that there will either be smaller congregations present in sanctuaries; or we will make the decision or be ordered to cancel worship altogether. People will find out that there are other things to do on Sunday morning; they will find other ways to meet their spiritual needs. With the trend in this country already being away from worship attendance, what kind of event will you sponsor, what kind of special worship will you have, what kind of celebration will you have to welcome people back to church when this is over? And, that is what we need to remember—it will be over.

3. Encourages sessions that will continue to have in-person worship services and meetings to recommend that members adhere to the following commonsense measures:

- A. Greet each other with a wave or praying hands, especially during the passing of the peace.
- B. Wash hands frequently throughout the day for at least 20 seconds.
- C. Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- D. Cover mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- E. Self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms, which include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- F. Stay home when sick.
- G. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (containing at least 60% alcohol) in easily accessible areas located throughout the church.
- H. Avoid the shared loaf of bread and common cup during communion and consider postponing the celebration of the Lord's Supper to a later date.
- I. Strongly encourage those who are members of the vulnerable population as it relates to this virus to consider staying home until the covid-19 virus situation improves.
- J. Keep abreast of the latest information from the [Centers for Disease Control](#), the [World Health Organization](#), the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), and the [South Carolina DHEC](#),

As we seek to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ during this coronavirus pandemic, the Presbytery Coordinating Team of Trinity Presbytery calls upon all its member congregations to pray.

Let us pray...

- for God's protection and deliverance;
- for healing for those infected;
- for families who have lost loved ones;
- for first responders – doctors, nurses, and aides providing medical care;
- for those traveling abroad and at the moment are stranded and cannot return home;
- for wisdom for medical and scientific experts seeking a cure for this virus;
- for public officials who have to make the hard decisions to quarantine citizens who may have been exposed to the virus; and,
- for religious leaders who must make the difficult decisions to continue, modify or cancel in-person worship services and meetings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [Preparedness for Pandemics](#) by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Office of Theology and Worship [A Pastoral Statement on the Coronavirus/COVID-19](#)
3. [An Advisory Opinion about the Pandemic as it relates to the Constitution of the church](#) by the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
4. [A Call to Prayer](#) from the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
5. Churches in Trinity Presbytery that provide livestreaming. Sessions that decide to cancel in-person worship can encourage their members to participate in real time Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) worship on Sunday mornings via one of our congregations online.
 - a. Eastminster Presbyterian Church at 9:00 & 11:15 AM <<https://eastminsterpres.org/live-services>>
 - b. First Presbyterian Church, Aiken at 11:00 AM <<https://www.aikenpresbyterian.org/>>
 - c. First Presbyterian Church, Clinton at 11:00 AM <<https://livestream.com/fpcclintonsc>>
 - d. First Presbyterian Church, Greenwood, at 9:00AM<<https://www.firstgreenwood.com/contact-us-3/>>
6. Churches in Trinity Presbytery that upload audios and/or videos of worship services that can be replayed later online.
 - a. Bethany Presbyterian Church (audio) < <https://bethanypresclinton.org/sermons>>
 - b. Downtown Presbyterian Church (audio) <<https://www.downtownchurch.me/sermon-audio>>
 - c. First Laurens Presbyterian Church <<https://www.firstpreslaurens.org/sermons>>
 - d. Forest Lake Presbyterian Church (audio) <<https://flpc.org/sundays/sermons/>>
 - e. Lake Murray Presbyterian Church <<https://www.lmpchurch.org/sermons-devotionals>>
 - f. McGregor Presbyterian Church (audio) < <http://mcgpres.org/worship/sermons>>
 - g. Seven Oaks Presbyterian Church (audio) <<https://www.sopc.net/sermons-2/>>
 - h. Shandon Presbyterian Church (audio) <<https://www.shandonpresbyterian.org/sermons/>>
 - i. Spring Valley Presbyterian Church
<http://www.acswebnetworks.com/springvalleyipc/services/article396026.htm?body=1>>
 - j. Westminister Presbyterian Church, Columbia
<https://www.facebook.com/pg/WestminsterPresofColumbia/videos/?ref=page_internal>