

**NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
CORONAVIRUS GUIDE
FOR
PASTORAL LEADERS, JUDICATORIES AND CONGREGATIONS**

March 17, 2020

Updated March, 20, 2020

Updated March 24, 2020

Updated March 28, 2020

Updated, April 6, 2020

Updates are highlighted in green

With the Covid-19 pandemic bearing down on the globe, New York has one of the highest concentrations of cases in the United States. **As of Sunday, April 5, 4,758 New Yorkers have died because of the Corona virus.** Given the swirl of pronouncements, orders, legislation and advice, we offer the following guidance and observations. The New York State Council of Churches has prepared this guide for churches and judicatories.

The guide reflects our review of statements and guidance of our denominational, governmental, and advocacy partners. We are also monitoring emerging laws, executive orders, and legislation to deal with the crisis. Please bring to our attention any updates or critiques, and we will seek to modify the guide as the number of reported cases undoubtedly will continue to expand.

Our communication is a communal process. This is also a moment where churches need to exercise good leadership in the public square. Stay well informed about emerging public policy, advocate accordingly, and reach out to your communities. Remember, your parish is your neighborhood and city and not just who is in your four walls.

According to the Wisconsin Council of Churches:

“Churches around the world are learning how to be imaginative in their ministry in order to be present to those in need in a time of social disruption. From the experiences of communities facing crises around the world, we know that faith leaders can play a transformational role in calming fear, disseminating accurate information, and modifying religious practices to help keep people safe while providing spiritual care and honoring important community traditions.

We see our role as churches, leaders, and compassionate Christians as:

- *combating fear with knowledge in order to encourage preparedness and decrease stigma*
- *maintaining operational continuity and continuing expressions of Christian life in the case of quarantine and disruption*
- *showing God’s compassion and care to those in our communities who are affected”*

If you have not already done so, you might consider forming at your church and/or judicatory, a COVID response team who can review ecclesiastical and government recommendations, and be in touch with various entities and denominational leaders to discern action steps and what can profitably be shared with your congregations.

REFLECTIONS

April 7, 2020

I am ordained in the United Church of Christ. One of the four predecessor bodies of the UCC is the Congregational Church which, by its nature, has a certain suspicion of any sort of government authority. We trace our roots to a time in the 1600's when we thumbed our nose at the King of England and hopped the Mayflower to set up independent churches in the new world. Many Congregationalists would have gladly participated in the Boston Tea Party. The anti-authoritarian strain of our religious tradition has served us well in many cases. Our commitment to religious freedom has been a useful check on governmental power.

In an effort to get it straight as pastors, however, we must not become independent operators. Instead, we gather with one another to listen, receive exhortation, and act on our conscience in the context of an accountable and covenantal community where we collectively discern the mind of Christ. As our Christian conscience dictates, we are among the government's fiercest critics when it proffers injustice. We are also its strongest supporters when we think the government has it right. I am reminded what The Reverend William Sloan Coffin, Senior Minister at New York's Riverside Church, said many years ago. "There are three kinds of patriots, two bad, one good. The bad are the uncritical lovers and the loveless critics. Good patriots carry on a lover's quarrel with their country."

The COVID-19 crisis is testing our theological approach. We hear strong directives from Governor Cuomo and Mayor DeBlasio for us not to gather for in-person worship. President Trump, to his credit, also backed off his hope that we would pack our churches for Easter. We know that, when it comes to their warnings about the spread of the virus, these politicians are not fooling and they don't want us to risk our lives or those of our congregants. We get it. The incredibly vast majority pastors get it. In an interview with Democracy Now, Clifton Daniel, Dean of St. John's the Divine in New York City, is clear with pastors they are making a bad decision if they allow for in person worship. Dean Daniel's exhortation was in response to stories about pastors covered in The Hill, CNN and other news outlets which shows pastor's anti-authoritarian tendencies on full display when it comes to COVID. Some have persuaded their Governors to deem that the church is an essential service. Their hubris is breath taking where they have, as Dean Daniel puts it, "decided that they are serving some need other than the needs of the people."

My exhortation to my fellow pastors, in covenant, is simple: It's important religious leaders do nothing to not hurt the people who trust them the most. When our elected official tells us to stay home and reach out in other ways, they have it right. If some of us ignore their warnings, and go ahead with in-person worship, it just prolongs the crisis and

it will mean it takes much longer for the rest of our congregations, who are doing the right thing, to have the ability to worship in person. So the government, in this case, seeks our welfare and we should listen. Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback, a mega church, put it correctly on NBC Nightly News, gathering in person right now is “unbiblical”.

If there is reason to criticize the government right now it's not over physical distancing laws. Instead, it might better to challenge policies and laws which favor the very rich at the expense of the most vulnerable who pack our groceries, clean our bed pans, and deliver our take out. We might be critical of the fact that the third stimulus bill largely excluded undocumented immigrants from benefits. We could be critical that the New York state government just cut Medicaid, passed laws which increased incarceration and, again, underfunded our ability to respond to homelessness. But as we wade into the political realm, we must remember our praise and our critique of the powers and principalities of this world is always rooted in our love for our neighbors and a shared sense of generosity.

As we approach Easter, it is well to remember that the tomb, “our church”, will be empty because the resurrected Christ has already left it and made his presence known out in the world in such places as a dusty road and lonely road to Emmaus (an empty Times Square or a wind-swept rural town). Remember Christ was made known in the breaking of the bread in a very small gathering in someone's home and not a mega church. The resurrection teaches us that God chooses life over death. In that spirit, check your ego and anti-authoritarian tendencies and embrace the risen Christ this Easter. Stay home!

March 28

Having served as a pastor for three congregations, I understand the pressure of caring for our “members” first before serving the community. Some pastors grow weary of members who think we should offer extra kindness to them before getting to people in our neighborhoods. Institutional inertia can lead the faithful to forget that there are other faithful, who never come to our church, who clean our houses and public space, mow our lawns, clean our elder's bed sheets, and take care of our children.

Fortunately, so many pastors are saying, during the Covid-19 crisis, that God- created religious institutions send people out to care for those which others declare as not belonging. The golden rule comes to mind. Neighboring is what we call it. We care for our members but resist the pressure to be apolitical and turn our congregations into country clubs. While adapting to public health restrictions, we keep our ministries open to serve the homeless and provide food for the hungry.

Congregations are employing their staffs and volunteers to do the best public ministry they know how by using virtual technology for worship and AA groups, calling others instead of texting, and reaching out in ways they never imagined. We encourage people to be more creative in the way they volunteer. We speak out in the public square for a more God centered society. One church just shelved its weekly benediction to say, “this service ends here, and more service happens outside these walls”. In this spirit, we call on Federal and State Governments to not balance their budgets on the backs of the poor, and center their aid on for profit and non-profit

institutions that don't line the pockets of CEOs but are committed to firing no one and seeking the common good. In the middle of a public health crisis, we call on government to invest in our medical care and to not exclude any one especially elderly and undocumented people. We ask for reductions in the prison population. We ask the Federal Government to not facilitate any state cuts to Medicaid. We will not tolerate policies which inflict more pain on the infirm and the least of these. Instead, we call on everyone to contribute to the common good as they are able. We join the Patriotic Millionaires in calling on the very wealthiest New Yorkers, who are doing surprisingly well during this crisis, to be taxed more to do their part. Indeed, Amazon just announced it is hiring 100,000 more people. A hedge fund manager just scored millions on stock market fluctuations.

But while we keep our ministries vital to serve our communities and speak out for just public policy, we ask our lawmakers to help us help others. Faith leaders across the state just sent a letter to Washington asking for assistance, consistent with separation of church and state, to keep faith institution's public infrastructure in place. [Click here](#) for the letter facilitated by New York State Council of Churches and Judson Memorial Church's Bricks and Mortals which is committed to helping congregations improve their buildings for service. More signatures are welcome. Do give the money to workers so they can pay their tithe. Washington seeks to assist corporations and not-for-profits keep their workers. We also ask for the same assistance to keep faith communities strong to help us be the long-term blessing our country needs. We will put it to good use. Not all congregations can move beyond their self-absorption. But those who do are essential, essential services.

The Reverend Peter Cook
Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches

SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICES AND SERMONS

Check with your local church to find out how to participate in worship. Please consult with your regional and national denominational bodies for a wide listing of worship services during holy week and the season of Easter. For instance, the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York offers a [list of services](#) with links which are taking place in churches during Holy Week, Easter and beyond.

There is such an abundance of wonderful worship offerings all over New York. Here are a few samples using very simple and more complex technologies.

The Riverside Church offers some of the most creative approaches to online worship. [Click here](#) for the archive. [Click here](#) for a particularly powerful sermon, *Lost Opportunities*, by The Reverend Dr. Cleo LaRue address the gap between rich and poor during the Covid Crisis.

Asbury United Methodist Church in Rochester worships at 10:00 on Sunday morning. You can see past worship services by [clicking here](#). The Reverend Dr. Stephen M. Cady II is the pastor.

In the North Country, Massena United Church of Christ offers worship at 10:00. [Click here](#) for a sample. The Reverend Judy VanKennen is the pastor.

Plainview Reformed Church offered this [Palm Sunday Service](#). The Reverend Cheri Kroon is the Pastor.

Here is a link to worship at [Abyssinian Baptist Church](#) in Harlem. The Reverend Dr. Calvin Butts is the Pastor.

Here is a link to [worship](#) at [St. James Episcopal Church in Skaneateles](#).

NPR Story

To offer you a little perspective and guidance, we commend to you with this uplifting [interview](#) with a Rabbi, an Imam, and an Episcopal Bishop which was broadcast on NPR which perhaps will lend a little perspective.

Acts 2:43 to 47

The Coronavirus reminds us of the communal aspects of our faith where we bear one another's burdens and care for one another.

The book of Acts reminds us that:

"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

A more secular reflection which mirrors the counsel in the book of Acts can draw on our traditions of caring for the poor and bearing each other's be found in this [Messaging Guide](#) published by the [Million Voters Project](#), a coalition of 7 statewide and regional community organizing networks: [AAPIs for Civic Engagement](#), [Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment](#), [California Calls](#), [Coalition for the Humane Immigrant Rights](#), Orange County Civic Engagement Table, [PICO California](#) and [Power California](#).

Prayers from American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan New York will be sent to you everyday by signing up [here](#) along with a display of past daily prayers.

Prayers from National Council of Churches

During this time in which the whole world is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, National Council of Church is posting Daily Bible Readings from the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching, Spring 2020, play a meditation to guide your prayers for

inspiration and engagement. You can follow daily readings, prayers, and meditations on the NCC website at <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/topics/daily/>

From Faithful America:

God is our refuge in the storm, and will be with us no matter what happens. When we pray, we can give thanks for that comforting presence, growing ever closer to God in hard times. We can also ask for strength to take the necessary steps and health precautions.

Below is a prayer for this moment from retired Lutheran Bishop Martin Wells. (You may also appreciate this [litany from America: The Jesuit Review](#).)

God of healing and hope; in Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear. Look with mercy on those who have contracted the new virus, on any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger. Through this time of global concern, by your Holy Spirit bring out the best not the worst in us. Make us more aware of our interdependence on each other, and of the strength that comes from being one body in you. Through Christ our wounded healer, Amen.

Prayer for a Pandemic prepared by St. Mary's Academy in Portland, offered by Bishop John Macholz, Upstate New York Synod, ELCA

*May we who are merely inconvenienced
Remember those whose lives are at stake.*

*May we who have no risk factors
Remember those most vulnerable.*

*May we who have the luxury of working from home
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.*

*May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close
Remember those who have no options.*

*May we who have to cancel our trips
Remember those that have no safe place to go.*

*May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market
Remember those who have no margin at all.*

*May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
Remember those who have no home.*

*As fear grips our country,
Let us choose love.*

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen.

St. Mary's Academy, Portland.

BASIC ADVICE AND FEDERAL AND STATE COMMUNICATIONS INCLUDING GUIDANCE FOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Governor Cuomo is his April 5 communication tell us *“Every county in New York State now has confirmed cases of Coronavirus. Our “New York on PAUSE” policy remains in place. Non-essential workers must stay home except for essential activities like going to the grocery store. When you're not at home, you must practice social distancing, and we also encourage you to wear a face covering in public (but do not purchase surgical masks — we must reserve those for healthcare workers and first responders). These are extraordinary times, and it will take all of us working together to beat this vicious virus”*. [Sign up](#) for nightly e-mails with the facts you should know about the novel coronavirus pandemic from Governor Andrew Cuomo.

[Click here](#) for the coronavirus statistics in New York by county

Dr. Erik Eiting, emergency room doctor at Mt. Sinai Hospital, offers an inside look at the COVID-19 crisis including clear-headed advice about what we know about the virus and how to treat it. Dr. Eiting was a guest on a [town hall](#) sponsored by State Senator Brad Hoylman and Assembly Member, Deborah Rosenthal.

[Center for Disease Control Corona Virus website](#) is the key reference point for all state and city departments of health.

For more clarification about rules governing religious activity, go to the website of the New York City Center for Faith and Communities by [clicking here](#). Center for Faith and Community Partnerships of the NYC Office of the Mayor holds a weekly faith leader call at 1:00 on Tuesdays which offers important updates for faith leaders and space to ask questions. Dial in at (332) 330-8894 (No code needed). You can also contact The Reverend Dominique C. Atchison, MDiv. Executive Director, Center for Faith and Community Partnerships, NYC Office of the Mayor, Phone: 212-346-6350, Cell: 646-832-8251 or datchison@cityhall.nyc.gov if you have questions. You can also pose question by filling out [this form](#)

The New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs has issued [guidelines](#) particularly geared to the immigrant community but has excellent comprehensive information which apply to all New Yorkers.

Children’s Defense Fund of New York offers an [overview and guide](#) tailored to children and families.

Here is the [website](#) here is the website New York City Health Department

Here is a [website](#) for the Department of Health for New York State

More than 85,000 volunteers from New York and across the country have answered the state's call to join New York's surge healthcare force. We are awed by the heroism and selflessness of these volunteers. If you are interested in joining, enlist [here](#).

The Federal Government approved its third stimulus package, the CARES Act, which can be viewed in its entirety by [clicking here](#)

Consult New York State Council of Churches at WWW.Nyscoc.org. The website includes updates on the Corona Virus Response and Suggestions on how you can act on legislation. Locate your regional and national denominational websites. A listing of sites can be found at WWW.Nyscoc.org.

UPDATED RULES FOR RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

Governor Cuomo and Mayor DeBlasio, again, repeat that there are to be no-in-person religious gatherings. Worship leaders can continue to tape services from their houses of worship--if necessary. Churches may also open for private prayer as long they follow social distancing guidelines. There is not a restriction on the size of funerals but social distancing guidelines (stand six feet apart) will be strictly enforced and families are urged to keep gatherings small. Funeral homes may apply additional restrictions. While the vast majority of religious communities from all faiths are abiding by the rules, a handful are not. Fines for violation of the rules have increased from 500 to 1,000 dollars. Sheriffs and NYPD will close a house of worship and they will arrest people if they fail to follow the law or social distancing practice.

Hospitals, with established systems in place, may be able to accommodate volunteer chaplains. It's important to remember that hospital systems, however, must not be overrun with volunteer chaplains who are not certified and trained and work at cross purposes with hospital chaplains already in place. Chaplains should engage in active listening and not proselytization.

The City of New York is looking for use of space in religious facilities and will also be accepting donations from disaster relief groups from denominations including money, Personal Protection Equipment like N95 masks and ventilators. In some cases, the city will pay rent and purchase offered materials. At the state level, **more than 85,000 volunteers from New York and across the country have answered the state's call to join New York's surge healthcare force. We are awed by the heroism and selflessness of these volunteers. If you are interested in joining, enlist [here](#).**

We also give thanks that the Cathedral of St. John's the Divine opened its doors to a field hospital and that New York Board of Rabbis and the United Methodist Church of New York combined to open a center for spiritual care at the Javitt's Center.

While New York City guidelines are, perhaps, more developed than any other parts of the state, they should be heeded by any community in New York. It's important religious leaders follow these guidelines so that they do not hurt the people who trust them the most. For more clarification about rules governing religious activity, go to the website of the New York City Center for Faith and Communities by [clicking here](#). **Center for Faith and Community**

Partnerships of the NYC Office of the Mayor holds a weekly faith leader call at 1:00 on Tuesdays which offers important updates for faith leaders and space to ask questions. Dial in at (332) 330-8894 (No code needed). You can also contact The Reverend Dominique C. Atchison, MDiv. Executive Director, Center for Faith and Community Partnerships, NYC Office of the Mayor, Phone: 212-346-6350, Cell: 646-832-8251 or datchison@cityhall.nyc.gov if you have questions. You can also pose question by filling out this [form](#)

A Note about Drive in Worship

Some churches are considering drive-in-worship in Drive in Theaters. While a creative idea, it is not advisable to have people gathering in their cars in close proximity to each breathing, talking and singing with the windows rolled up. If a church has the capacity to organize this effort, they already have the capacity to do virtual worship and they should continue to do so.

Given these restrictions, you should consider conducting digital or phone based worship gatherings. The Wisconsin Council of Churches offers these [Resources for Streaming Worship](#) Your denomination may also conduct a region wide digital worship service.

Faithful America commends this article *“from Sojourners, ‘[Community Without Communing: Resources for Virtual Church.](#)’ You might also appreciate TechSoup’s “[How to Broadcast a Facebook Live Event in 5 Easy Steps.](#)” (To make sure non-Facebook users can watch your live event, read Facebook’s own instructions on [embedding their videos onto your website.](#)) Smaller churches might consider something like [FreeConferenceCall.com](#) for a simple audio-only prayer service.*

If you are non-denominational, take advantage of the public materials from other churches, including [the Episcopal Church](#), [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#), the [United Methodist Church](#), the [United Church of Christ](#) and the [Catholic Archdiocese of Washington.](#)”

The Governor’s Office of Faith Based Initiatives has offered this very helpful and detailed [Faith on Facebook Took Kit.](#)

Internet access, we must admit, is not great in some parts of our state particularly in rural areas. [Click here](#) to see recent report on Vermont Public Radio. 2 billion was allocated in the third Federal stimulus package for internet access.

ADDITIONAL SPECIFICS ON LAST RITES, FUNERALS, RECEPTIONS AND PASTORAL CARE

According to New York Interfaith Disaster Services

“Regarding Last Rites and other bedside rituals or prayers. NYIDS recommends clergy work with family or healthcare professionals to offer prayers via video chat (examples: FaceTime, Snap Chat or WhatsApp).

If Holy Communion or Holy Oil/Anointing of the Sick are to be administered, NYDIS recommends that communion and/or a cotton ball soaked in holy oil, be placed in separate zip lock bags, given to family or nursing staff, and administered under video supervision accompanied by prayers offered by a priest or other duly appointed religious leader.

If, in accordance with any faith traditions prayers for the sick and/or dying are to be offered, they should be offered by the appropriate lay or ordained leader via video chat with a family member or medical professional holding the device bedside.

Regarding Funerals or Burial: House of worship and funeral home funerals should be suspended, and the dead should be buried or interred during a graveside service of no more than 10 people who strictly adhere to social distancing protocols. Individuals traveling to the burial should only travel with members of their own household – if anyone is unwell, they must not attend. If desirable, the service may be live streamed or recorded to share with others not able to attend.

No Repast or Receptions should be held following burial or cremation. For Jews, no Shiva should be held in person. Shiva calls should be made virtually.

All pastoral care, spiritual care, and in-person visitations should be suspended. Use social media, phone calls to share regular healing prayers and message to help communities remain hopeful.

All congregations should encourage members to take care of and check-in on their elderly and vulnerable neighbors. With the ability to travel being curtailed. Only neighbors helping neighbors will hold our humanity together – children and family cannot travel safely to care for family, we must care for them ourselves.”

Given the strict guidelines regarding funerals, if your tradition allows it, you may consider a common practice of doing a graveside service and burial and then work with the family to do a memorial service at a future date once the COVID Crisis passes. Stay in touch with the family during this in between period to offer pastoral care within in safety guidelines. Offer to reach out to those on the periphery who may also be suffering and, of course, continue to offer care for congregants who might be grieving. Some families might even prefer to postpone the burial itself especially if one is burying ashes. Confer with your own funeral home director about your options including costs for burial and other services. Please be aware that funeral home directors may call on you to do services for non-members or you may be called for help by non-members. It's important that you treat all requests with equal amounts of compassion and generosity for members and non-members alike. Confer with colleagues if you are trying to think your way through complicated pastoral interactions during this crisis.

COLLEGIALITY, SELF CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Pastors and chaplains should make an effort to confer with one another and not socially isolate while staying physically distant. If you are a pastor, call your chaplains at care facilities and prisons and ask them how it is going and if they need help. This would be a good time to get

better acquainted with your colleagues for support if you have not already done so. Judicatories may also organize support calls for clergy. For example, New York Conference, United Church of Christ is offering pastoral town meetings for clergy on line. The Episcopal Diocese has also created virtual clergy gatherings. The Poor People's Campaign is arranging support circles across the state.

Take care of your mental health, and check in on others in need.

It is just as important to take seriously the coming mental and emotional toll as it is to take seriously the coronavirus itself. This is a time to live our values and care for one another.

Call your loved ones. Talk to your pastor about setting up a phone tree so that isolated parishioners can receive a friendly phone call each day. Be kind to overworked retail staff. Stand up to the anti-Asian racism that's spreading alongside misleading news. **[Here is a statement of statement of concern published by ABC's Alliance of Asian American Baptist Churches.](#)**

[Thousands of therapists have signed up to offer free emotional support to New Yorkers who are struggling with the mental health impact of this pandemic. Call the state's hotline at 1-844-863-9314 to get free emotional support, consultations and referrals to a provider.](#)

[NYS has a message for victims of domestic violence during this stressful time: You Are Not Alone. If you are in a dangerous domestic situation, NYS will help you find safe shelter. You are not trapped just because of Coronavirus. Call 1-800-942-6906.](#)

[New York Residents' Spiritual Care Hotline has been created by the Baptist Convention of New York and the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief by call 877.697.7297 Daily 9AM to 9PM](#)

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has five suggestions for "**[Taking Care of Your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty.](#)**"

Pastors may appreciate *Christian Century's* "**[10 guidelines for pastoral care during the coronavirus outbreak.](#)**"

And all of us can take heart from **[quarantined Italian neighborhoods singing together from their windows](#)**, and from this article in the *Seattle Times*: "**[Coronavirus sparks an epidemic of people helping people in Seattle.](#)**"

WORKING FROM HOME, REACHING CHURCH STAFF, AND PASTORAL CARE STRATEGIES

If at all possible, have your employees work from home but ensure your parishioners know how to be in touch with them. If you have not done so already, update your call systems at church with clear instructions on how those who call can locate a staff person and with provision to leave a confidential voice mail so people do not have to leave a message on the general answering machine.

FORM A CORONA VIRUS RESPONSE TEAM

Judicatories and congregations, if they have not already done so, could set up Corona Virus Response Teams

1. Set up phone trees or online vehicles of communication to stay in touch with people who might be socially isolated, homebound or in institutions (prisons, nursing homes etc.)
2. Ascertain whether people need food and/or help with child care. Urge your parishioners not to hoard supplies at supermarkets and share, when possible, with others.
3. Communicate with denominational leadership
4. Monitor government communications regarding the crisis and speak out on unjust legislation and policy as needed.
5. Reach out to local food pantries and shelters to ascertain needs and to offer volunteers, donations, money as appropriate. Please refer to [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) for more description of the various forms of food assistance available.

CHURCH FINANCES

1. If you have not done so already, this would be a good time to institute a tool for online contributions
2. If you have endowments or investments, you should confer with your investment advisor about your portfolio.
3. You may need dollars to expand compensation for a more rigorous cleaning protocol.
4. Remember reaching out to your parishioners and the community at large and doing good ministry, is also good financial practice in that you have your membership and community more closely identify with your institution because you have cared for them. As you become more generous with others they will be more generous with you. This is a moment when you can be the church at its best. People will want to invest in that sort of church. Pastors, this is a good opportunity to share the pastoral load with your lay leaders and volunteer groups.

5. Be on look out for people in your church who can give extra dollars or donate goods and services in kind to offset some drop in giving from parishioners experiencing financial uncertainty or hardship. Some might also be able and willing to pre-pay their pledges so you do not have to prematurely draw from investments or to make up for possible drops in giving.
6. **The United States Congress passed and the President signed the CARES Act on March 27. This is the third stimulus bill which offers the most direct financial assistance to churches. As of April 3, churches, as long as they are 501c3s can apply for the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) for a forgivable loan to cover salaries, rent, mortgage, and utility payments for 2 ½ times of a church's average monthly payroll. The loan is forgivable as long as employees are retained of employees previously laid off at the church, return to work. Churches apply for the PPP through the bank through which they do their business. They can also apply for the Emergency Economic Injury Disaster Loans. For clear instructions on how to apply, [click here](#). You can also confer with your denomination's financial officer who should be able to offer you guidance. Even if you don't think you need the assistance at the moment, the financial future is uncertain and it is good to have the extra money as a hedge against possible drops in giving and investment income.**
7. **We are now working with our partners on the fourth Federal Stimulus package. [Click here](#) to view the letter we sent prior to passage of the CARES Act. We are now revising the letter taking into account the assistance already provided by the Federal Government. Contact The Reverend Peter Cook at Pcook@Nyscoc.org or 508-380-8289 if you have ideas about what should go into the fourth stimulus package. We are working with the Fiscal Policy Institute, Citizen Action and others to outline requests for stimulus 4.**
8. **Remember that the CARES Act allows people to give \$300 and have it be tax deductible even if they take the standard deduction. It's a little incentive for people to keep up their giving.**
9. **We also invite you to review with your financial officer or attorney your church's insurance policies to see if they can cover any losses including payment for business interruption.**

ACCESS TO TESTING AND HEALTH CARE

If a parishioner is sick or displays symptoms of Corona Virus, they should stay home. If after 3 to 4 days of symptoms or if you are very ill reach out to their doctor for advice and to determine if they should be tested. Advocate for any one who might have trouble accessing their insurance benefits which are owed to them or find costs unbearable because underinsurance.

We urge you to be in touch with parishioners regarding their health insurance and the care they receive at this time. Many are either under insured or have no insurance. [Families First](#)

Coronavirus Response Act which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump along with other aid packages, provides for some health benefits including free testing for Corona virus. The Governor has instructed health insurance companies to not charge co-pays for remote doctor consultations. **While the Federal law is more limited in what is offered to immigrants, the state of New York does not discriminate and offers free access to all New Yorker to Covid testing, exam and treatment regardless of immigration status.**

Call your elected representatives for assistance and case management and use the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) and the CARES Act.

Here is a [website](#) about maintaining health coverage during the Covid-19 crisis.

PAID SICK LEAVE, FOOD ASSISTANCE, UNEMPLOYMENT

Check in to be sure parishioners have access to paid sick leave and access to childcare and food. The United States Congress passed sick leave provisions and expanded unemployment insurance, provision for a parent to stay home if the school of their children is closed, and relief for businesses and the self-employed. Again, refer to the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act which passed on March 19](#). It is worth noting that the Response Act, with regard to sick leave, only applies to companies under 500 people. Companies under 50 employees can apply for a hardship exemption. These rules would suggest only about 20% of our population is covered under this legislation. **The third stimulus bill, the CARES Act, has much more robust assistance for unemployment. As long as you have a social security number, you can apply for unemployment from your state and the Federal government will add an addition 600 per week to the state allocation. Independent contractors and gig economy workers, previously excluded from unemployment, are now eligible. If you need help navigating the CARES and accessing its benefits, please contact your Congressional office for assistance.**

CHAPLAINS IN HOSPITAL, PRISONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

[This article appeared in the New York Times](#) describing the front line work of chaplains who are more than usual offering care in lieu of what can be offered by pastors.

We strongly urge individual congregations and judicatories to please reach out to chaplains and ask what would be helpful while offering emotional and material support.

New York Interfaith Disaster Services has been asked to help equip the chapel and staff respite area in the [Javits Center](#)'s 4,000 bed COVID-19 Field Hospital. They are working with the facility's command chaplain. Thank you to [Joseph Potasnik](#), [New York Board of Rabbis](#) and New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church for the start-up donations in support of this effort.

If you can support NYDIS in equipping these caregivers supporting our military and medical staff, please donate at www.nydis.org/donate/

Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has moved to a system with one chaplain going to work a day. The chaplain continues to handle death notices and grief counseling and can meet with prisoners in person. They can also walk the halls to meet with

prisoners with increased visits to medical units. Legal counsel can confer with clients behind glass. No small group meetings and in-person-worship is allowed. Chaplains have to work with a wide variety of religious groups, as they always do. It's particularly challenging at this time to help different groups navigate new safety restrictions.

In addition, inmates will be able to receive five (5) free stamps per week for use in accordance with [Directive #4422](#), "Inmate Correspondence Program,"

Two (2) free secure messages per week via electronic tablet, and One (1) free phone call per week in accordance with [Directive #4423](#) "Inmate Telephone Calls."

Needless to say both prisoners and employees are particularly vulnerable to an outbreak of the virus. Once again, we urge pastors to reach out to their local prison chaplains to ask how they can be of support. Contact Peter Cook at 508-380-8289 or Pcook@nyscoc.org if you need help identifying the chaplain in your local Department of Corrections facility.

We are concerned that incarceration rates will again rise after passage of the state budget which dramatically altered the bail law to add many more crimes that are bail eligible including people with a misdemeanor being bail eligible being picked up on a second misdemeanor. Discovery laws were also weakened to allow prosecutors wiggle room to withhold information from the defense. Many people are unnecessarily incarcerated for parole violations. This piece in [The Intercept](#) is one of many articles discussing the challenges of over incarceration during the COVID Crisis. Listen to this [interview](#) with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Democracy who offers additional insight on incarceration during the COVID crisis.

NURSING HOMES AND IN HOME CARE

For those who wish to visit parishioners in extended care facilities, Governor Cuomo has banned these visits for the time being. You will need to find other ways to stay in touch with residents including phone calls and video conferencing. Call the facility to ask for guidance and ascertain what accommodations can be offered at this time. If you have an IT person on your judicatory staff or in your congregation who could help isolated people access online communication platforms, please do so. One suggestion, was to use e-cards to communicate with residents.

Please be aware that home care workers cannot access facemasks and hand sanitizer and find it a struggle to do their job given social distancing requirements. For a fuller discussion the challenges read [this article in City & State](#).

Please also be aware of Medicaid funding issues for long term care, especially in home care, which your parishioners might be encountering. **These challenges to fund in home care could get worst with the passage of the state budget which cut Medicaid. We will provide more updates on the state of Medicaid in our Social Justice and Legislative Section where will recap what was passed in the final budget.**

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

With regard to all housing and homeless concerns, be advised that housing courts are closed across the state indefinitely beginning on Tuesday, March 17. Be on the look out for anyone facing eviction or is precariously housed and act as best you can.

On March 19, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced 90 days of relief on mortgage payments for New Yorkers experiencing financial hardship. All New York mortgage servicers will be required to waive mortgage payments for individuals facing financial hardship, and may not make negative reports to credit bureaus, or charge late or online payment fees. The state is also postponing or suspending all foreclosures. Additionally, the Governor instructed the Department of Financial Services to require all state chartered banks to waive all ATM fees, late fees, overdraft fees, or fees for credit cards.

City & State reports that, “Even as a new Siena College poll shows that 51% of New Yorkers are concerned about meeting their monthly financial obligations, rent relief doesn’t appear in sight. The state budget passed without including a provision canceling rent. And separate legislation did not pass despite the best efforts of state Sen. Michael Gianaris, the bill’s sponsor. His legislation would cancel rent for 90 days, although there is disagreement about whether his bill offers the best rent freeze solution. Gianaris suggested on Twitter that renters ought to hope for action through an executive order. But that doesn’t seem to be in the cards, since Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said that his eviction moratorium “took care of the rent issue.” Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez expressed her support for a rent relief as a companion to homeowners already receiving mortgage release. To best understand the concept around rent relief which is paired with relief for smaller landowners listen to the Congresswoman’s interview about rent relief on Brian Lehrer.

Now that the state budget has passed, we are evaluating what monies might be available to assist the homeless. We are also evaluating what money might be coming from the Federal Government. While there was some assistance, its notable that Home Stability Support and new funding for public housing was not included. There may be some access in another part of the budget for public housing amounting to no more that 700 million. We will make an appeal for more public housing assistance from the Federal Government.

The Coalition for the Homeless is calling on the Department of Housing Services in New York City to make allowance for more private rooms for homeless people since having people sleep and gather in large congregate areas can facilitate spread of the virus. They have also called on the Federal Government for 5 billion in housing relief since there was no provision for housing assistance in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act or the CARES Act. Read this article from Politico for more details. Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi is now working with the Coalition for the Homeless and the Stable Homes Campaign to prepare a letter of request to Senator Schumer and the New York Delegation to include the

5 billion in the fourth stimulus package. Please [click here](#) for instructions on signing to the Fair Rent Subsidy letter. Signatures are due by the end of business on Wednesday, April 8

VOCAL-NY and allies released [this open letter](#) to Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo yesterday calling on them to protect homeless New Yorker's amid COVID-19. Right now in shelters people are in crowded rooms with no major changes to sanitation or the ability to social distance. On the streets, people are running out of places to eat and shower.

Please boost [tweets](#) on social media and use the hashtags [#HomelessCantStayHome](#) and [#ProtectHomelessFromCOVID](#).

IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants in your congregation and community might be particularly vulnerable. Speak forthrightly against any blame for the COVID19 crisis which might be placed on people because of their race, economic status or national origin. Be on alert particularly for increased violence against people of Asian descent.

Ensure that everyone knows they can access free testing regardless of whether they have insurance. Comprehensive health care for undocumented immigrants is better in New York City by calling **311** but no one in any part of the state should be turned away for testing or have to bear any cost for that testing. State

The New Sanctuary Coalition of New York is saying that thousands are still reporting to ICE, attending immigration hearings, and being detained in jails around the nation without access to necessary and proper health care and preventative equipment and measures. This week, ICE announced that they would be banning "social visitation" in detention facilities. This move will only further isolate human beings who should not be detained in the first place, keeping them from staying in touch with their loved ones.

Please go to New Sanctuary Coalition for more guidance and how you can help including offering accompaniment. The [Gothamist](#) is reporting increased encounters with ICE at airports where family are apprehended while delivering loved ones to the airport to return back to their countries of origin.

The New York Immigration Coalition has issued the following [demands](#) regarding the status of immigrants in light of the COVID Crisis.

New Sanctuary Coalition is a passionate faith-based advocate for immigrants. Here is a recent communique from Ravi Ragbir, Executive Director.

We don't have soap or cleaning supplies. We're locked in for over 18 hours a day. We're locked in rooms with people who are sick and have been in contact with people who've tested positive but they won't test us. We have no protection.

6 phones for 60 people and we're only allowed to call during 3 hours a day so there's always a crowd around the phones, they're not cleaned or disinfected between calls. They tested a few people with symptoms but sent them back in with us before the results came back and won't tell them what the results are.

They aren't giving us safety gear. They're not taking any tests or precautions. The officers aren't being tested. They're still bringing in new detainees from other states and other facilities in here with us. They're not testing them down in intake. Nobody feels safe in here at all.

I'm having chest pains I don't know what to do. Medical isn't doing anything because they don't have the training or test available. The staff don't care what happens to us. It's a few more people in here coughing and they still have them locked up in here with us. The unit flooded with brown water top and bottom floor and we were forced to clean it all with no protective gear. I need help

ICE is holding people whose only "crime" is the legal equivalent of forgetting to renew your driver's license in conditions that virtually guarantee that they will be infected with, suffer with, and potentially die from Covid-19.

I'm not going to sugarcoat this: these detention centers are going to become death camps.

The situation is so dire that detained friends across the country are undertaking hunger strikes as a form of nonviolent protest. And in response, officers are menacing them with rifles, threatening them with isolation, removal of phone call rights, and deportation. Telling them that they will never see their homes or families again unless they give up their protest.

We at New Sanctuary Coalition will not rest until every Friend is released from detention. And we need your help to make that happen.

- (1) Call your local representative and ask "What are you doing to protect people who are detained?"*
- (2) Call the jails and demand that they #FreeThemAll immediately.*
- (3) Call the airlines and demand that they stop transporting human beings for ICE.*
- (4) Donate to the L.I.F.E. Bond Fund – we have drained the bond fund to get our Friends out, and continue to bond Friends out as soon as new donations come in. The average bond right now is \$7,500. Every dollar you can spare helps.*
- (5) Donate to New Sanctuary – everything about Covid-19 has made our work more crucial, and more complicated. We need your support now more than ever.*

In solidarity,

Ravi Ragbir

p.s. -- NSC staff are working night and day to #FreeThemAll and to support our Friends outside of detention as well. Volunteers are the backbone of this effort, and there are many ways to help out from the safety of your home. [Click here](#) to explore opportunities and sign up!

The CARES Act provides sick leave, unemployment and other benefits which, unfortunately, largely excludes undocumented people. As we look towards creation of a fourth stimulus package, [click here](#) to view a letter which was sent to Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Schumer on March 20 by a variety of organizations and faith leaders with demands to help immigrants in Federal legislation. If you did not sign the letter, you can still adapt it to your purposes and address it to additional people including Senate Majority Leader McConnell, House Minority Leader McCarthy, and your individual Congressperson. [Click here](#) for a quick sign on letter to advocate for immigrants as part of the bill. We also, again, strongly urge you to reach out to the immigrant residents in your community on whom you rely for many services to hear their story and ask how you can be of assistance including advocacy with your lawmakers. For an overview of what happened with immigrants in the third stimulus bill, listen to this [interview](#) with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Democracy Now. You can also call her office for more specific analysis of the law and how to access benefits that are available.

HELPING BUSINESSES AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS

Restrictions are being placed on local businesses and employers. Sports clubs, nightclubs, movie theaters, small theater houses and concert venues are closed. Cafes and bars are limited to take out only. Reach out to your local businesses and encourage people to patronize them to the degree that is possible given gathering restrictions. Not-for-Profits and **businesses in addition to churches should also be encouraged to apply for all forms of state and Federal assistance available to them.**

GUIDANCE ON EXERCISE, PARKS, GOLF COURSES ETC.

Here is some communication from City & State about what is happening with recreational facilities, parks and golf courses.

Suburban golf courses remain open, despite COVID-19

While Gov. Andrew Cuomo has ordered the closure of all non-essential businesses and public playgrounds, some state-run golf courses on Long Island and in Westchester remain open – despite those New York City suburbs being among the areas hardest hit by the new coronavirus.

Most public and private golf courses have been closed for an indefinite period of time, however, including President Donald Trump's clubs in the Bronx and Westchester.

In an April 2 briefing, Westchester County Executive George Latimer confirmed that the county's six golf courses remain open. "We have kept the county parks open so that people who have no other available recreation have at least some opportunity where they can get out, stretch their legs, get some fresh air," Latimer said. "Golf, to me, is analogous to hiking and bicycling, which are relatively individual sports. You do it with one, two or three other people, but not with 20 or 40 as other types of sports."

Nassau County, on Long Island, announced it was closing all county-owned golf courses and driving ranges early last week, but it reversed the decision on March 26. "The golf courses are officially reopened with some modifications to accommodate social distancing," Nassau County Executive Laura Curran said at a press conference.

On Wednesday, Gov. Cuomo closed basketball courts and playgrounds to prevent New Yorkers from increasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by playing team sports. Parks will remain open. But the question remains: Why are golf courses like parks rather than basketball courts or soccer fields? Read the full story here.

Are you a tennis player? The United States Tennis Association has issued its guidelines for playing tennis during the COVID crisis recommending that people refrain from playing (touching balls, gate handles, nets etc. could spread virus) and do solitary exercise and strength training. Perhaps practice your ball toss outdoors?

COLLEGE STUDENTS

For college students, their dorms are closing and they are asked to go home. For international students, this might be difficult to do. Also be aware that some students may find themselves homeless. The Reverend Sandy Damhoff, Protestant Chaplain at University of Albany tells us that the vast majority went home with perhaps a few receiving an exemption for extenuating circumstances in the dorms while other are in off-campus apartments. There was a need for storage when students were given two weeks to get their stuff moved out. But now move-out is suspended until the "shelter in place" policy lifts. U-Haul is providing one month free but they are among the most expensive companies so it's really not worth it if they have to pay for the rest of the months until they can return in the fall. If you have members in your parish who could offer free storage for college students in your garages or basements to not have to pay for self-storage, this could help. Universities should be reimbursing to students prorated amounts for room and board.

The state of New York has offered student loan relief up until April 30. [Read this article](#) for details on state assistance. In addition, there are various proposals circulating at Federal level to offer student loan relief as part of the stimulus package.

EDUCATION, SCHOOL CLOSURES, ONLINE LEARNING, CHILD CARE

Many of your parishioners will have to stay home with their children because school is closed. The Federal government offers up to 14 days of paid leave to allow parents to stay home with their kids. Be aware, however, that there may be need for child care and enrichment activities

and that the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) has a lot of gaps in coverage. **The CARES Act offers more generous benefits to parents staying home with children.** This would be a good time to ask your legislator about child care and paid sick leave provisions in the state budget.

Reminder for NYC Public School Families: The New York City Department of Education (DOE) has launched a request form for parents whose kids need tablets to participate in remote learning – parents can fill out a form and submit to New York City Department of Education. For New York City parents whose students will be learning from home, can access a portal for remote learning resources from New York City Schools. Families can still pick up grab-and-go breakfast and lunch from any New York City school building between 7:30am-1:30pm tomorrow.

Pre-K Update: Given the uncertainty and upheaval COVID-19 has caused in all of our lives, New York City Department of Education has extended the deadline to apply for Pre-K through March 29, 2020. You can apply online at WWW.myschools.nyc or by calling 718-935-2009 (Monday-Friday, 8am-6pm)

The Albany City Schools have published this directive regarding grab and go lunches and others directives.

Churches, please reach out to your local school district and ask how you can help. Many school districts are providing take out breakfast and lunch. Again, your church might offer other kinds of food assistance and child care. **Children's Defense Fund of New York offers an [overview and guide tailored to children and families.](#)**

HELPFUL ARTICLES

Articles analyzing state budget in [Politico](#) and [Huffington Post](#)

[New York Times coronavirus coverage](#) has been removed from behind the *Times'* paywall, making it free for all readers.

["Covid-19 is not the flu. It's worse."](#) (Vox)

["Worried about coronavirus? If your loved one is over 60, read this."](#) (CNN)

["The Dos and Don'ts of 'Social Distancing.'"](#) (*The Atlantic*)

["How canceled events and self-quarantines save lives, in one chart."](#) (Vox)

["Here's how to avoid coronavirus scams."](#) (NBC News)

