



Advocacy Resource for Covid- 19 Accelerated Levels of Testing, Contact Tracing, Isolation and Systemic Change

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Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

This advocacy resource for COVID-19 accelerated testing, contact tracing and isolation is provided for your use by the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA). We are committed to the demonstration of the love of Christ being demonstrated to the neighborhoods that we serve and Baptist witness in Metropolitan Philadelphia (Delaware & State College).

We fully anticipate that the Covid - 19 pandemic will be a part of our lives for the foreseeable future. We must act in ways that protect human life and live out the mandate to love our neighbors as we love ourselves during this public health emergency. While some of our communities have not yet experienced high rates of infection and death we realize that it is only a matter of time until the virus reaches every city, suburb, and rural setting in which our congregations are located. We encourage the practices that protect health and the systemic change that will lessen the impact of the spikes and waves of the virus that are anticipated. The systemic response to COVID-19 at the federal, state, and municipal levels for testing, contact tracing, and isolation needs to increase by 5X to 10X times to adequately protect our nation and communities.

We share a particular concern for those communities of color that have experienced a disproportionate impact of COVID - 19. We recognize that this phenomenon (disparity) is rooted institutionalized racism within our society.

We urge all member congregations to join in the Solidarity Philadelphia advocacy initiative and encourage the needed response from our Federal, State and Local government/municipalities that protects the citizens of our nation. We hope that you will join us in this effort.

This advocacy booklet contains the following resources for your use:

1. A Public Statement of PBA Board of Directors
2. The Solidarity Philadelphia Advocacy Initiative
3. Related COVID -19 Studies, Reports, and News Articles
4. Advocacy Letter Draft A
5. Advocacy Letter Draft B
6. A Bible Study for biblical/theological reflection

Please endorse the effort as a congregation and share this information with members of your congregation and encourage their participation. **Please feel free to forward a copy of this resource to persons and religious/faith-based institutions that will join the effort.**

Rev. James E. McJunkin Jr.
Reginal Executive Pastor
PBA

A Public Statement of the Philadelphia Baptist Association

We are the oldest continuing community of Baptist Believers in the United States of America founded in 1707. We continue our tradition of speaking out and providing service in times of national crisis.

Concerning the reopening of the US economy in the midst of the COVID -19 pandemic, we urge congregations to model the love of Christ by speaking out for a science and public health-based reentry process that strengthens our economy without compromising the safety of the most vulnerable in society.

We recommend that faithful believers work with and encourage all US citizens to participate in vigilant monitoring and advocacy for:

- A comprehensive plan (national, state, and local municipality), for accelerated testing, contact tracing, and quarantine processes as essential components of reopening policies and strategies
- A prudent reopening process of the Federal Government and State Governments, which holds leaders accountable for their action, inaction, and public policy enforcement in protecting human life
- Safety for people working on the front lines of health care provision and essential services
- Swift and comprehensive support for neglected cultural and racial/ethnic groups, the working class, and people living in poverty, who disproportionately bear the impact of COVID-19 virus given historic US socioeconomic health disparities
- Nutritional support for people in need and ensuring safety in the food service industry (retail operations through distribution networks)
- The provision of health care and mental health services including incarcerated persons in the US
- Safety of persons living in continuing care communities, congregant care facilities, and the homeless
- Development of responsive and responsible ministry models for congregational direct action, models that support the most vulnerable who fall through the safety nets in our communities during this pandemic
- Networking among our member congregations in outreach ministries

Adopted May 26, 2020

The Solidarity Philadelphia Initiative

The diversity among the citizens gathering protesting and demonstrating deep passion for justice for the family of George Floyd and solidarity with African Americans (people of color) who suffer historic traumatic policing policy is a testimony to the human spirit! Its energy has ignited a worldwide movement for racial justice. This sustained impassioned protest continues during a pandemic that has taken over 117,000 lives in our nation. The pandemic and the protest are inextricably bound.

The complex historic and divisive issues of systemic racism and economic disinheritance have been clearly defined by exceptional leaders across our country in recent days. We pledge our solidarity with the efforts to end the excessive use of force in policing policy and we support systemic social change in America.

Join the Effort for Systemic Change

We find that the reversing of societal abandonment and neglect of people of color who suffer disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through accelerated levels of testing, contact tracing, and quarantine to be the most tangible and most immediate expression of meaningful systemic change that this nation can achieve.

We are mindful perhaps as never before that we are one human family. We face the continuing common threat of a pandemic that is not discriminating, our health will be collective or not at all. And so, we unite in solidarity to advocate for the implementation of strategies that reduce our vulnerability to the spikes and waves of a pandemic that will be among us for the foreseeable future.

Join the call to work together as people of faith for our common good as we live into a model of moving forward as one nation. Here is a link that will help you connect with civic leaders. Let them know of your concerns <https://seventy.org/publications/elected-officials>.

On (TBA) we will gather in a video conversation to discuss strategic advocacy efforts to more fully engage the State of PA and local municipalities in targeting communities of color in particular and all neighborhoods in the provision of mass testing, contact tracing, and quarantine. These actions are needed to protect human life and to safely reopen our economy.

While we await the conference, given the demands related to the protest movement, please write civic leaders in your area and express your concerns.

Join us by Engaging Your Organization's Membership:

The Philadelphia Baptist Association
PBA - American Baptist Women's Ministries
Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity
Esperanza
Senator Vincent Hughes
Rev. Dr. Wilson Goode

**COVID -19 Studies, Reports, News Articles
Testing, Contact Tracing, & Isolation
USA-Federal, PA, and Philadelphia**

COVID-19 Has Unmasked Significant Health Disparities in the U.S.

American Heart Association

<https://newsroom.heart.org/news/covid-19-has-unmasked-significant-health-disparities-in-the-u-s-essay-on-behalf-of-the-association-of-black-cardiologists-suggests-solutions>

How low wage work, work conditions and existing health and income disparities contributed to inequity in COVID-19 prevalence and mortality

Research to Policy

<https://www.research2policy.org/covid19-african-american-employment>

Massive US Contact Tracing Effort of Critical Importance.

Johns Hopkins University

<https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/04/24/contact-tracing-crystal-watson/>

A National Plan to Enable Comprehensive COVID-19 Case ...

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health – Center for Health Security

https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200410-national-plan-to-contact-tracing.pdf

American College of Physicians is closely monitoring the global situation caused by the outbreak and spread of COVID-19.

American College of Physicians

<https://www.acponline.org/advocacy/where-we-stand/coronavirus-disease-2019>

PA Plan for Testing, Contact Tracing & Isolation

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Contact-Tracing.aspx>

Updates on PA Plan for Testing Contact Tracing Isolation

<https://www.pennlive.com/news/2020/05/pa-has-enough-testing-contact-tracing-for-now-but-will-need-more-of-both-for-larger-scale-reopening.html>

Gov. Wolf Should do More to Ramp up Covid and Antibody ...

thephiladelphiacitizen.org > covid-testing-pa

Pa. Sets Modest Goal to Conduct 8,500 Coronavirus Tests per ...

www.inquirer.com > health > coronavirus > spl > penns...

Containment | Department of Public Health | City of Philadelphia

www.phila.gov > guides > safer-at-home > containment

U.S. Nursing Homes Run Low On PPE As COVID-19 Deaths There ...

www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/11/...

Study of COVID-19 in Correctional Facilities

<https://www.ncchc.org/study-of-covid-19-in-correctional-facilities>

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<https://seventy.org/publications/elected-officials>.

Draft A

Sample Advocacy Letter

Date:

The Honorable Tom Wolf
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Jim Kenney
City Hall, Office 215
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Governor Wolf and/or Mayor Kenney (insert your municipal leader here)

We are pleased with your measured approach to re-opening the economy. We agree that the process should be based on data determining dates. We are responding to your process as people of faith and we want to share our concerns. We advocate the following:

- A comprehensive, national, mass testing, tracking, and quarantine process as an essential component of reopening policies and strategies
- Supporting and holding Federal, State, County, and City Government leaders accountable for their action, in public policy enforcement to protect human life
- Safety for people working on the front lines of health care provision
- Swift and comprehensive support for neglected cultural and racial/ethnic groups, the working class, and people living in poverty, who disproportionately bear the impact of the COVID-19 virus given historic US socioeconomic health disparities
- Ensuring safety in the food service industry (from packing through grocery store workers)
- Providing health care and safety for incarcerated persons in the US
- Safety of persons living in nursing homes and senior living communities

In addition, we want you to know that we are in support of the Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium that has been organized by Dr. Ala Sanford. The Consortium wants to strengthen the City of Philadelphia's response to this threat by promoting greater access to coronavirus testing for people in underserved communities who are experiencing symptoms or who believe that they have been exposed to someone who was diagnosed with COVID-19. As mass testing is developed, we want them to be considered for service provision.

In addition, we are willing to open our facilities for similar testing outreach programs. Again, we are concerned for the safety of the most vulnerable in society and we are speaking out for a science and public health-based re-entry process that strengthens our economy. We would very much appreciate your continued efforts to bring all US government entities to the table for the protection of humanity.

Sincerely,
Name
Organization Represented

Here is a link that will help you connect with civic leaders. Let them know of your concerns <https://seventy.org/publications/elected-officials>.

Advocacy Letter Draft B

Dear [Senator/Representative]:

I'm writing to you to urge your attention and decisive enactment of bipartisan legislation to suppress, mitigate, and eradicate the impact of COVID -19. This global pandemic has destructively impacted health and wellbeing, individual and corporate life, our local and national economy, and the global community. The present crisis is exceeded only by evidence-based expectation that without a vaccine, the virus will wreck future havoc and unresolvable loss to the quality and manner of life we cherish in our nation. Your leadership role equips you to expedite consistent, inclusive, comprehensive policies and practices toward restoration of health and the economy.

I write to you as a person of Christian faith and member of the Philadelphia Baptist Association of the American Baptist Churches, USA. My commitment to social justice and my personal faith inform my commitment to live responsibly with hope in this insecure time. I now ask Federal, State and Municipal governments, leaders, and agencies to fully exercise your critically important power to be change agents for good.

As of May 27, 2020 more than 100,000 persons have died from COVID – 19 in the USA. In the state of PA, COVID-19 cases number 69,417 with 5, 265 deaths. Scientific data confirms the high death rate among the elderly, poor, marginalized, and front-line workers who courageously risk their lives daily. Today, when southeastern PA hopes to re- open into the “yellow phase”, testing remains minimal, contact tracing is at best only beginning, effective quarantine is inconsistent particularly for the poor, aging, and vulnerable, and vaccine availability and accessibility seems a precarious hope in 2020.

Specifically, I request you to listen to and learn from the epidemiological scientific community's wisdom and expertise; to engage and enact bipartisan legislation focused on personhood, not politics; and to procure accelerated testing, antibody testing, and contact tracing now. I urge you to appropriate and distribute funding and resources; to prioritize safety of children and the aging; to alleviate food scarcity; and to sustain economic solvency for the unemployed, COVID patients, and at risk persons/families.

I look to you to fulfill your elected/appointed responsibility to represent each person in your jurisdiction including the underserved, uninsured, overlooked, working poor, marginalized and excluded to ensure access and availability of services for all people.

I look forward to receiving your feedback and learning opportunities you may provide of ways I can join/support your efforts to resolve this crisis. Thank you in peace and hope.

Sincerely,

[Name and date]
(your contact email or phone number)

Let them know of your concerns <https://seventy.org/publications/elected-officials>.

A Bible Study

Do you want to be healed? (In Defense of Healers)

The biblical story of the pool at Bethesda as written in the Gospel of John Chapter 5:2-16 can be observed from more than one vantage point. One view of the events in the passage is seen from the perspective of the paralyzed man, his lived experience.

A man who was paralyzed for 38 years was lying on his mat at the pool of Bethesda seeking a miracle, hoping against hope. He wanted to walk again so he had people to take him to the healing pool of ritual cleansing. They left him there so he could get into the water when an angel troubled the water. He had to be the first one into the pool if he was to be made whole. He hoped to be healed but he had little to no chance because he could not walk. If he crawled fast enough and fell into the water, he could be healed. The problem was that there were so many sick and infirmed at the pool that the likelihood of his being first was slim to none. He was a person of hope who remained hopeless much of his life. He knew this, and yet he came day after day looking for a miracle of healing.

Then one day he met Jesus. When asked if he wanted to be healed, he immediately rehearsed his lived reality. While he had someone to bring him to the pool daily, he had no one to get him into the water before anyone else got in. Jesus told him to stand up, to pick up his mat, and to walk. By faith he did so and was healed instantly. As he was walking toward the religious leaders, they saw him, and they demanded to know why he was breaking the rules and carrying his mat on the Sabbath. He told them that the miracle worker told him to carry the mat and he followed that person's command. The man who was healed after 38 years became a victim of his own good fortune. He got healed on the wrong day of the week and he was in danger of his life at the hands of the religious establishment.

A second vantage point is that of the religious rulers. They were furious with the man that was healed for breaking their rules. The healer was in mortal danger for breaking the Sabbath and causing the man he cured to break the Sabbath. Mind you well that the Sabbath was a symbol of relationship between a people and their Creator God. The Sabbath began at the time of creation as a day of rest. It was a time to be in communion with God the Creator. It was good to rest and spend time in celebration of life and the giver of life. It became a ritual that shifted to religiosity and then became religious tyranny. What was meant to be a sign of loving relationship became a death sentence to the one who broke the rules. In the mind of the religious elite it was their responsibility to root out this evil and to set things in order.

When the man who was healed told the religious leaders that it was Jesus who healed him and that he told him to break the Sabbath and carry his mat, the leaders plotted to kill Jesus. Jesus' declared self-perception and the breaking of the rule of the Sabbath deserved nothing less than the punishment of death, in the minds of religious establishment. The fact that the man was healed was not material. His healing was of little consequence. The person who was healed and the healer broke the rules and they were law enforcement protecting the status quo.

A third perspective to consider is that of Jesus. The words of Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist who wanted to know if he was the promised leader demonstrates his self-perception. Jesus said to them, “go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.” At the center of the call of Christ, his anointing, is wholeness and healing for God’s creation. Luke 7: 19 & 20; Luke 4:14-21; Isaiah 61:1ff.

A fourth vantage point might be that of the Jewish community of that day. They were a proud people of rich heritage who at this point in history were under Roman rule. They were not the first-class citizens of Rome with all the rights and privileges appertaining thereunto. Rather they were the subjects of Roman domination. Their historic law was subservient to Roman law. The religious hierarchy of the Jewish community was permitted a level of governance providing that it would keep the Jewish nation under the control of Rome. If the Jewish religious leaders kept the masses under control, they would be given special privileges and could keep high status among their own people. Now there was considerable unrest in the Jewish community in that day. There were periodic uprisings against Roman rule. The desire for freedom from the oppressor was its own kind of hope against hopelessness. A disempowered people longed for a Messiah to set them free from Roman rule. The religious hierarchy had sway over the faith tradition and in Jesus’ perspective some took full advantage of the power that was theirs and the house of faith became a den of thieves. The people paid taxes to Rome and tribute to the temple. The Jews paid out over 50% of their income between the two institutions.

Allegiance to the religious elite was not a fixed reality. The zeal for freedom led many to ignore the faith as they sought political power through brute force. No doubt this was viewed as threat to the religious establishment who were charged to keep them under control. What is more, the power of the Roman army crushed the freedom fighters and they eventually sacked the city of Jerusalem itself.

The vantage point of the Jewish community members of that day was a mixed bag of faith and fear, freedom and domination, joy and sorrow, and silent desperation. What is of note is that we see no uprising by the masses for the healing leader Jesus. When and where that movement began it was crushed by religious leaders. In fact, Jesus’ crucifixion would be tolerated at best by Rome to appease the religious establishment.

The final lens we will lay upon this biblical record is that of the sick. The multitudes gathered at the pool seeking healing were largely abandoned by society. Whatever the healing arts of that day offered to the Roman citizen was not at the disposal of the Jews. In this passage they were brought to the pool to await a miracle. In this instance they were left to compete against one another, to jump, crawl, or fall into the healing waters.

Each day they were brought to the place of Mikvah and taken home at the end of the day if they had care givers. Neglect and abandonment were far too often the lot of the sick. It was they whom Jesus visited and often healed. His acts of kindness and miraculous healing power was a threat to the powers that be. The unspoken rule of the day may have been, keep your power at all costs, stifle uprisings among the masses, abandon the sick, and shut down the healers.

I must state here that my remarks are not intended to be statements of antisemitism. I am reflecting on the biblical record of my faith that is Judeo-Christian. Now I can move to the discussion of the healers and the sick in our society as best I understand it. My lived experience of the current pandemic and what is happening to the masses is my focus.

Today, nearly 80,000 people have died in our country and the projections are for tens of thousands more to fall victim to COVID-19. We all live in fear, realized, or sublimated. Our healers are left to risk their lives in the service of the humanity. Our nation is not able or willing to provide them adequate personal protective equipment without political pressure. The instruments of healing are provided in a sporadic, mismanaged and haphazard pattern driven by political machinations. Our healers have prescribed mitigation, testing, tracing, and quarantine. These instructions are not followed to completion. It is not clear that we want to be healed. We are reopening society in the face of a second wave of pestilence. The Center for Disease Control has been tangled in bureaucracy, so much so that we the public do not know the full impact of the pandemic or how best to protect ourselves. People are being forced back to work in settings that do not adequately protect them. Healthcare is being denied to many and is under the active threat of removal for others, now, during a public health crisis.

The word of Jesus to the paralyzed man is a good word to us today. Do you want to be healed? So many among us are just like the paralyzed man that was sitting at the pool. We are hoping against hope that the full capacity of the nation will be realized for the health of the people. We know that a major change must take place in order to bring the levels of testing, tracing, and quarantine up so that we do not experience a vicious second wave of pestilence.

Stop your sinning Jesus challenges. Stop falling short of your capacity for empathy. Is the command to stop missing the mark of a higher calling a good word for us today? Questions for reflection:

How hopeless must it feel to finally be among those who are sick enough to be admitted into the hospital if you have adequate health insurance that is. Is that the best we can provide? Are we falling short as a nation? What is your lived experience in the course of this pandemic?

How helpless is the feeling of not being able to provide food for the family for the newly poor? How do we address the needs all who will remain destitute for a significant period of time? Is doing nothing to help them a sin?

Where is the religious establishment today? Are people of faith engaged in helping the healers, affirming the leading epidemiologist, assisting the Center for Disease Control to protect our lives? Are we monitoring and joining in the mandated actions of mitigation, testing, tracing which protect life?

Is our theology so wrapped in blind allegiance to political ideology that we live in denial of the pandemic, ignore protective measures, or live out the paralysis hope against hopelessness?

If we don't stop our "sinning," might our indifference to the lives of the most vulnerable in society allow the virus to fester, grow, and ravage life around the world? Are we falling short of the call of Christ on our lives?

We are running out of time to implement the strict measures for a safe return to work. Do we really want the best for one another? That is the question.

Wellness, the health of human life, is at the center of spirituality, the religious experience, and the gift of prosperity. Health is not in competition with political power or economic recovery. Christ's biblical question remains relevant even this day. Do you want to be healed?

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