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COVID 19 – Our Response and Responsibilities

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Faith leaders are considering their appropriate response and responsibilities in light of the emergence and spread of the novel Coronavirus, or COVID-19 as it has been designated by the World Health Organization. The developing situation is a living reminder of the global interconnectedness of our world today. Whether we acknowledge it or not, **we are all connected as part of God's good creation**. People of faith respond to such developing situations with **compassion and care first**, rather than fear and panic, because of the courage that faith inspires.

As people of faith, we are called to remember two important tasks in such situations:

1. We are called to **respond first as Christians, as the church, the body of Christ**. The first response is **compassion and concern**, undergirded by **prayer and service**. Our first impulse is courage, compassion, and faithfulness. Those principles, rather than fear and panic, guide our decisions and actions moving forward. Bias and racial profiling often accompany public crises, as they have in this case. Resist and renounce these temptations in your response to this crisis.
2. Because of our first response, we are also called to **inform ourselves about the reality of the developing situation and about known best practices for dealing with the situation in a coherent and faithful way**. We must draw on reliable resources for guidance in both preparing for and dealing with this developing situation.

With this in mind, receive these words of encouragement and suggested practices:

LISTEN TO SCRIPTURE – As at any time, but especially in times of crisis, scripture reminds us that **we are people who are called to respond** (i.e. Matthew 25:35-36; James 2:15-16). May we remember to whom we belong (identity) and to what we are called (service and mission.)

PRAY – for all those who are affected, and infected, across the globe and for those who care for them; for the medical specialties and authorities who are working to mitigate the spread of infection; pray for leaders to make informed decisions for the public good, especially those who are particularly vulnerable; and pray for those around us who are feeling anxious and fearful.

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BASIC PRECAUTIONS – PERSONAL

- If you are feeling ill, stay home. Don't delay seeking medical attention if you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
- Wash hands frequently and avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Maintain social distance and practice good respiratory hygiene (cough and sneeze into tissue or bent elbow, etc.)
- Stock up on – but do not hoard – fluids and healthy foods, anti-inflammatory drugs, decongestants, etc.
- Use basic disinfectants (bleach, Lysol, alcohol, etc.) to clean frequently touched areas – doorknobs, counter tops, faucets, light switches, and handles.

BASIC PRECAUTIONS – CHURCH (worship, meetings and other gatherings)

- Address any and all changes to usual practices openly, with candor, understanding and sensitivity and, when possible, with a sense of humor, recognizing we are in unusual times.
- Avoid hugs and shaking hands. Encourage people to greet one another with simple, non-physical gestures such as smiles, a hand over their heart or other gestures of Christian love.
 - Modify worship practices of “greeting time” or “Passing the Peace” to eliminate physical touching, perhaps singing a greeting song instead.
 - Consider similar gestures if there is a greeting line following worship, or if it is your church's practice to hold hands for prayer, benediction, etc.
- Carefully think through the preparation and distribution of communion elements.
 - Those preparing, serving and officiating should sanitize their hands. The use of gloves, especially for those involved in preparation and serving, might be helpful.
 - Consider offering individual cups and pre-cut bread at stations, with the server handing the bread to the individual. Alternately, prepared juice and bread is available in individually sealed packets.
- Give consideration to receiving financial gifts during worship, especially regarding the passing of offering plates. This would be an appropriate time to encourage EFT gifts or move ahead with online giving.
- If you offer refreshments during coffee hour or share a meal together, have the kitchen host(s) serve food to guests rather than allowing self-service from a buffet line or large platters.
- As in our homes, use basic disinfectants (bleach, Lysol, alcohol, etc.) to clean frequently touched and common areas – doorknobs, counter tops, faucets, light switches, and handles.

PROVIDING PASTORAL CARE

- Stay informed of guidelines offered by your local government and school officials, including hospitals and nursing homes, and adapt your own pastoral care practices accordingly. Congregants may need to extend a special measure of grace and understanding to pastors and others providing pastoral care may not be allowed to visit in hospitals and long-term care facilities during this time.
- Find ways to encourage connection with those who may be alone, whether at home or in a nursing home, etc. Make cards available each week for notes and signatures that can be mailed to such individuals. Establish a group to regularly make phone calls, etc., to assure these dear ones that they are not being ignored or forgotten.

- With church leaders, develop a communication plan to quickly address an unfolding situation, such as:
 - The pastor or other key worship leaders are ill and unable to be present for worship;
 - Local (or other) government leaders advise large groups not to gather for a period of time (i.e. worship services, etc.) Explore, also in advance, ways to hold worship virtually via FaceBook live, for example.

Basic resources:

Indiana Department of Health, including up-to-date information:

<https://www.in.gov/isdh/28470.htm>

WHO – World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

CDC – COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC Basic Pandemic Preparedness for Faith-Based Organizations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/pdf/faithbasedcommunitychecklist.pdf>

Articles:

Ten Guidelines for Pastoral Care During the CoronaVirus Outbreak

<https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/quest-post/10-guidelines-pastoral-care-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Charity Amidst the Chaos: When Coronavirus Comes to Your Neighborhood

<https://christiancitizen.us/charity-amidst-the-chaos-when-coronavirus-comes-to-your-neighborhood/>

Handwashing, Hoarding, and the Healing of Naaman

<https://christiancitizen.us/hand-washing-hoarding-and-the-healing-of-naaman/>

Ministry in the Midst of a COVID-19 Outbreak

<https://christiancitizen.us/ministry-in-the-midst-of-a-covid-19-outbreak/>

Additional updates that are of particular interest to ABC Indiana & Kentucky churches will be made available via our e-news and/or the IN/KY Facebook page (search “American Baptist Churches of Indiana-Kentucky). As always, you are welcome to contact me directly.

Grace and Peace,



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