

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Considerations for Worship and Church Activities

As you make decisions about moving ahead with worship and other church activities in the weeks to come, please consider:

- **The Most Vulnerable**

- “What should we do about worship services and other meetings?” The short answer is this: **Our best advice is to cancel worship and any other in-person meetings through Wednesday, April 1, as we await further information.**
- As the church, this is an opportunity for us to act as faithful, responsible witnesses in our communities. We act, not out of fear, but out of genuine care and concern for those most vulnerable in our midst – those of us who are older; those of us who have chronic health conditions; those of us who care for those impacted by this virus. We act unselfishly for the sake of others and our communities. While we act with full confidence that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39), there may be times when we should be separated (at least physically) from one another.

- **Guidance from Local Health Officials**

- If you decide to continue with church activities, pay attention to the guidance provided by local health officials. If your local health officials have asked that large gatherings be canceled or if your local school system has decided to close, then use that guidance to help you make decisions about gathering for worship.
- Go to: [Virginia Department of Health](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/) or [coronavirus.gov](https://www.coronavirus.gov) for updated information

- **Enhanced Sanitation Practices**

- Focus on disinfecting door knobs, handrails, and tabletops
- Disinfect pews following worship
- Use gloves for food preparation and distribution
- Empty your baptismal font and fill when needed
- CDC checklists and other best practices for faith-based organizations can be found on our website: vasynod.org/covid-19

- **If you choose to gather for worship, consider these possible Modifications to Worship Practices**

- Verbal Greetings – Before worship, during the sharing of the peace, and after worship, ask individuals to limit themselves to verbal greetings. You may find it meaningful to place your hand on your heart and bow slightly as you greet one another with the peace of Christ.
- Bulletins – Provide a new bulletin for every individual at every service and consider moving to an all-inclusive bulletin with words and music to limit the need for handling of hymnals.
- Offering
 - Instead of passing offering plates during worship, consider placing a basket at the entrance of the sanctuary or in another appropriate spot to allow individuals to share their offerings.
 - Make digital worship offering opportunities easily accessible. If you need help creating a digital worship method, please contact Pastor John Wertz at: wertz@vasynod.org.
- Discontinue the practice of Holy Communion and use the Service of the Word for worship
- If you practice Holy Communion:

- Limit the number of people handling communion elements.
 - Discontinue the use of intinction.
 - Those serving communion should wash hands thoroughly.
 - Avoid touching the hands of the individual receiving communion when distributing.
 - Remember that our theology recognizes that we receive the benefits of the Eucharist in one element – bread.
- **Enhance Online Engagement**
 - See vasynod.org/zoom for more information, starting Monday, March 16
 - Offer online prayer groups, Bible Studies, and devotional resources
 - Record and share sermons and prayers online
 - If possible, offer live online worship
 - Share sermons and devotions from other congregations in the Virginia Synod
- **Increase Shepherding**
 - Create accountability partners to have individuals check on each other regularly
 - Consider setting a common prayer time, so folks will know they are praying together
 - Send out daily devotions via email or text
 - Create a phone tree for checking in with those who are isolated and/or not connected online
 - Send cards to those who are isolated
 - Send thank you notes to individuals who are providing care for others
 - Encourage individuals to disconnect from media – instead, watch a movie, listen to music, go for a walk
 - Pay attention to the impact on young children. For ideas on how to respond, see this post from [buildfaith.org: https://buildfaith.org/coronavirus-anxiety-children-and-the-church/](https://buildfaith.org/coronavirus-anxiety-children-and-the-church/)
- **Ministry Partners**
 - We understand that congregations have contracts with third-party organizations for the use of your facilities, and we encourage you to be in contact with those third-party organizations to determine the best way to proceed.

The apostle Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As we all respond to COVID-19, remember that God is faithful, that God's love is bold, and that God comes to serve and be with all God's people. Continue in your faithfulness. Be bold in making the good news of Jesus available in new and unexpected ways and seek opportunities to serve those who are in need.



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