

**Dear FMC Family,**

As we face growing concerns over the spread of COVID-19, we would like to offer words of care, guidance and encouragement.

For those already affected in a number of ways including those having contracted the disease, those quarantined as a result of potential exposure, or those affected by travel restrictions, closed schools or the like, we extend our prayers. In fact, we encourage the entire Church to be in fervent and earnest prayer for one another, for our communities and the global efforts being engaged to combat the spread of the virus.

We also want to extend words of guidance for our local congregations. We are communities that thrive in gathering, so questions have naturally emerged amid the closings and cancellations of many institutions and public events. There are many options available to us all, and, through prayerful discernment, would encourage you to explore one or many of these options as they apply to your local context:

1. Encourage anyone exhibiting flu-like symptoms or respiratory distress to refrain from attending public services or gatherings of the church, and to seek medical attention.
2. Since symptoms can be very mild and often do not appear at all for 1-2 weeks, encourage anyone who has reason to suspect possible exposure (travel in a high-risk area or contact with a confirmed victim) to self-quarantine for 14 days or until testing rules out infection. Such precautions are not born of fear but are meant to protect the vulnerable (the elderly, those with underlying medical issues or compromised immune systems, etc.).
3. Engage networks of people in your congregation to check in on one another, pray for one another, and meet one another's needs as they arise.
4. A number of our congregations have sought to lessen contact during services by collecting offerings via one receptacle rather than passing them through the aisles of your church, engaging alternatives to handshakes like elbow-bumps, and making hand sanitizer readily available.
5. When serving the elements of communion, do so in ways that provide individual portions and means of serving.
6. Offer an attitude of peace to all. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, refusing to live by neither hysteria nor cynicism.
7. Abide by local health and governmental regulations, including bans on large gatherings if instituted.
8. Leverage other means to worship through social media live streams and electronic communication.
9. When caring for your worship spaces, go above-and-beyond normal protocols to disinfect.

In these ways we can exhibit our commitment to love our neighbor as ourselves doing so in wise and discerning ways. We are committed to continued monitoring of the situation and issuing further communication as needed.

With hope,  
Linda Adams, Keith Cowart, Matt Whitehead  
*The Board of Bishops, FMCUSA*