



Church Leader Call with PA Secretary of Health Dr. Levine on COVID-19 March 24, 2020

*Additional questions? Contact Kurt Weaver, Director of the Church Ambassador Network
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Summary

The religious community is part of life-sustaining services and plays a vital role in helping control this virus. Governor Wolf has not asked churches to close. Spiritual leaders are needed for their guidance and direction to their church members and the community.

The response from the state is three-fold:

1. **Mitigation (Prevention)** – Practicing cleanliness and social distancing (6 ft. of separation between people). The virus is spread through respiratory droplets. The most susceptible are the elderly and people with kidney or lung issues. Younger people are not immune. Small children are less likely to contract the virus.
2. **Testing** – This is being done through hospitals and independent labs.
3. **Preparation of the Health Care System** – Extra staff, beds, and supplies along with implementing emergency standards of care.

Questions and Answers

How can pastors and churches help the people of our Commonwealth?

We all have our role to play. As spiritual leaders, we need you working to help people in their spiritual life.

Are church meetings and gatherings like funerals or weddings prohibited?

The governor's order does not apply to religious events. Religious services are not prohibited. But the less people you have, the safer it will be.

Are church small groups allowed to meet and does social distancing actual work?

Social distancing does work – shown to work in other countries. The goal is to have less new cases. The fewer the people gathered, the safer we'll be.

Is a pastor permitted to live stream a church services from an empty church?

Yes. That's seems very prudent.

Can worship teams meet to record services or live stream?

Yes. Fewer people the better and take all the precautions necessary.

What about a church holding sunrise services or in parks?

Outside is better than inside. You have to keep social distancing. Again, the fewer the people, the better. Please understand that this is an emergency situation.

Is there any concern if your gathering is 10 or less?

Yes. Stay at home with immediate families as much as possible.

Is there less concern if your church is in a rural area vs urban?

No. I would do the best you can not to meet – rural or urban. The virus does not know urban vs rural areas.

Would you ever consider issuing an order for churches to shut down?

I do not see the Governor ordering it.

Are we expected to shut down pre-K schools?

There are some instructions on our website but overall, yes. There have been some exceptions for health care workers. Again, check out our website or the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Is a church permitted to hold funeral services?

We're not going to prevent religious services, but the more social distances and fewer the people, the better. The more people congregate, the more they spread COVID-19. Yes, I understand that you need to do religious services. Do the best you can.

What should a church do in making deliveries of meals or health needs?

Leave it outside the door and you leave. Don't have direct contact with them.

Is there concern with spreading the virus through charitable donations?

Very little. It does survive on surfaces. Normal cleaning procedures would make it fine.

Are there restrictions or precautions with any humanitarian efforts (Ex. Preparing meals)?

Try to make any aid efforts as remote as you possibly can. The more you can do things online, the safer it is. For food preparation, we want you to practice hand washing and all healthy preventative measures but yes, food prep is fine.

How long will this situation be?

I can't say. Right now, we're just on one side of it. Hopefully, as soon as possible we'll get on the other side of it. There needs to be a decrease in the rate of new cases in a sustained way.

When will we see an end to the bans and restrictions?

When we see a continuous decrease in the cases. When there's a plateau and then a decrease in new cases, then we will be able to begin lifting some of the restrictions.

What are the best steps for decontamination in churches?

There are guidelines on their website or contact us. General idea is using bleach to clean areas where public has gathered.

Will mobile units be dispatched?

There are currently several mobile testing units in Philly and Pittsburgh.

What is the incubator stage of the virus – how long does it last?

The virus can last between 2-14 days. The average of 5 days.

Does this virus have a temporary season?

We don't know. It's a completely different family of a virus.

Will there be economic relief provided to those in my church family losing their job?

We can speak to the public health part of this crisis. There are other members working with the Governor on that area.

Are churches able to access personal protective equipment (PPE)?

Right now, PPE – masks, gowns, gloves – are only being made available for medical personnel. Given the anticipated surge, we need to save all those resources for health care personnel. For anyone involved in health care operations, take all precautions if you are seeing patients.

Closing remarks from the call

Thank you for your religious and spiritual guidance. People need you perhaps more than ever. Vision is a healthy Pennsylvania for all. Thank you for your service. Stay calm. Stay home. Stay safe.

PA Department of Health: Resources for Community and Faith-Based Leaders (from the Center for Disease Control):

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

- [Disinfecting Your Facility if Someone is Sick](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Community and Faith Leaders](#)
- [Checklist for Community and Faith Leaders](#)

The Church Ambassador Network is a project of the Pennsylvania Family Institute.

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