



UPDATE MARCH 24, 2020

COMMUNITY OUTREACH DURING COVID-19

On March 23, 2020, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer issued an Executive Order to slow the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. [Executive Order No. 2020-21](#), requires all Michigan residents and most businesses to stay in their homes, except for essential life-sustaining purposes. The order took effect at 12:01am Tuesday, March 24 and it remains in effect until at least April 13, 2020.

Bishop David Bard responded with two statements:

[“Stay home and Stay Safe.”](#)

[“Easter is Coming!”](#)

This order will require all United Methodist Churches to suspend in-person church gatherings and close church buildings. Life-sustaining United Methodist ministries and missions may continue under provision 9D in the executive order: *Workers and volunteers for businesses or operations (including both and religious and secular nonprofit organizations) that provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals, individuals who need assistance as a result of this emergency, and people with disabilities.*

This would include ministries and missions providing access to food, water, basic hygiene items, and shelter like food pantries, feed programs, and sheltering ministries.

This would also include blood drives, which are considered essential and life sustaining. There is currently a shortage of blood. If you are scheduled to host a blood drive during the executive order, please contact your local organization about safety and sanitation protocols so that you and your congregation can make an informed decision.

It would NOT include any other community service or outreach missions and ministries.

These non-life sustaining missions and ministries should suspend in person meeting and should find creative ways to shift their services online or to telephone. This applies, also, to AA and NA meetings occurring at your church. Many AA and NA groups across the state are suspending in-person meetings and shifting to online or telephone. It is recommend you be in contact with your local group.

If your local church or UM-related non-profit is providing essential, life sustaining services, we believe you can make the best decision about whether to continue. As you discern your decision, we encourage you to consider the following:

1. Take a deep breath. As faith and community leaders, we have an opportunity to be a calm, non-anxious presence in the midst of so many unknowns. We can speak proactively about COVID-19 while maintaining a calm spirit and creating or providing ways for people who want to “do” something in meaningful and healthy ways.
2. The situation is changing rapidly. Congregations and organizations are encouraged to consult the most up to date information from them regularly:
 - [Centers for Disease Control](#)
 - [State of Michigan](#)
3. Consider Wesley’s Three Simple Rules: *Do Good, Do No Harm, and Stay in Love with God*. How is your response providing compassion and care, mitigating harm, and sharing the love of God with the most vulnerable members of your community?
4. If you faithfully decide to continue your ministry/program, you are encouraged to consider the following responses in relation to clients, staff, and volunteers:
 - Organize a response team to monitor, plan, communicate, manage finances, and increase church hygiene. If this is a ministry of a congregation, coordinate with your congregation’s response team.
 - Discuss how you can safely check on the well-being of impacted clients, volunteers, and staff. Use a telephone or other electronic means. Discuss how you might safely support those needing to shelter in place with food and other necessities.
 - Ask your volunteers and staff to stay home if they are sick, may have been directly exposed to the virus, or have traveled to a high-alert area (currently South Korea, Iran, Italy, Japan). Recommend they follow the [CDC guidelines](#) and refrain from attending church services during the 14-day incubation period.
 - If a volunteer, staff member, or client has COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, encourage them to contact their health care provider in advance to tell them about their symptoms before arriving at a doctor’s office or hospital.
 - Ask your volunteers and staff to avoid contact with ill persons.
 - Require your volunteers and staff to wash their hands before their shift with soap and warm water for at least 30 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol after washing hands and before putting on gloves (if gloves are available).
 - Ask your volunteers and staff to use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
 - Ask your volunteers and staff to avoid touching their face.
 - Clean and disinfect frequently-used equipment and surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, and phones regularly throughout the day.
5. If you faithfully decide to continue a feeding, pantry, or distribution ministry/program, you are encouraged to consider the following:

- If your ministry/program is a client-choice model (“free store”), it is recommended changing to a pre-bag model. Bags can be passed out quickly, and fewer persons touch the food items.
- Advise sick clients to stay home and ask a friend or neighbor to pick up their groceries.
- Extend hours or open an additional day, so clients are spread out to lessen congestion in the space or in the line. Make sure clients are standing at least 6 feet apart in line.
- Limit the number of people in the program/distribution space. If your pantry is held indoors, it is recommended moving the distribution outdoors or to a drive through model, contingent on weather conditions.
- Have a volunteer or staff person responsible for cleaning tables, counters, carts, doorknobs, pens, phones, and computer stations every 15 minutes throughout your distribution time.
- Temporarily postpone any food demos or cooking classes and refrain from offering food samples.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this more, please contact the Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director of Mission & Ministry (pperez@michiganumc.org, 517-347-4030 x 4076).

(The responses in points 4 and 5 are adapted from Los Angeles Regional Food Bank’s Corona Virus [Resources](#).)

[Click here](#) for a pdf version of this information.