

## **COVID-19 & Community Ministries & UM-related Non-Profits**

In response to COVID-19, [Bishop Bard is asking Michigan Conference churches refrain from in-person gatherings through the month of March.](#)

If your local church or UM-related non-profit is engaged in providing services to your community, we believe you are in the best position to make a decision about whether to continue or refrain from your services. 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 regularly consult the most up to date information from the:
  - [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. You might also consider what program/ministries provide basic humanitarian services (like access to food, water, and shelter) that require in-person interaction and what program/ministries are providing service which might be postponed or could be done virtually.
5. 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.
6. 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”) consider changing to a pre-bag model. Bags can be passed out quickly and fewer persons touch the food items.
  - If you decide to remain a client-choice model pantry then require your clients to wash their hands and wear gloves before selecting their food products.
  - 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.
  - Limit the number of people in the program/distribution space. If your pantry is held indoors consider moving the distribution outdoors, 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.
  - Post and distribute these [flyers from the State of Michigan](#).

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](mailto:pperez@michiganumc.org), 517-347-4030 x 4076).

(The responses in points 5 and 6 are adapted from Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's Corona Virus [Resources](#)).

