

Preparedness Plan For COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Fairhope United Methodist Church, Fairhope, AL

Level 1—Watchful Preparation (When there is no evidence of the virus in the community)

A. Encourage the congregation to “be not afraid” by assuring that the church is working on a plan and that we will stay up to date on the situation. If there is a crisis, the church will be there for its members and our community. We will get through it together with the help of God by offering the healing ministry of Jesus to our community.

B. Follow updates from the Center for Disease Control, the Baldwin County department of health, and Medicare.gov. Gather relevant phone numbers for emergency management. The following link provides guidance from the CDC related to churches:

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

C. Remind sick people to stay home and those who are immune compromised to talk with their doctor.

D. Remind people to wash their hands more than normal and offer hand sanitizer stations throughout the church. Washing for at least 20 seconds is very effective (feel free to sing the doxology while you’re at it). Avoid touching your nose or mouth. Clean/disinfect frequently touched areas, with special attention to light switches, phones, keyboards, etc. Ensure staff is up to date on standardized cleaning and disinfection practices and procure EPA guided cleaning and disinfecting solutions/devices deemed to contain the virus.

E. Alert the pastoral care team to make plans to help the church and community.

F. Alert church community ministries like the preschool, Scouting Ministries, Shepherd’s Place, Community Café and all other food prep teams to be watchful and to begin preparation.

G. Alert the prayer team to be praying for those affected around the world and to pray for our local community.

H. Create a team to monitor the threat level and determine what actions need to be taken in relation to this crisis. This team should include the pastor, pastoral care team leader, and persons from the medical field. Decisions should be made in conjunction with local authorities.

I. Alert finance team to make a contingency plan if giving is temporarily decreased due to market volatility.

Level 2— Disease Prevention (For when COVID-19 is suspected to be in the area)

A. Have our care giving ministries to continue its congregational support through phone calls and cards, with minimum personal contact. Tell all members of the pastoral care team over 70 that they should not make hospital or home visits until the threat is over (the virus seems to affect this population more-See JAMAnetwork.com for data).

B. Encourage members to have at least two weeks of food in case of a quarantine situation, especially canned, dried and frozen foods and beverages. Also medication to manage symptoms and enough prescription medications to last a month. Recruit delivery drivers for older members as needed.

C. Encourage people to avoid physical contact by not shaking hands or passing the peace. Intentional eye contact with words of grace and peace will be an edification to all.

D. As for Holy Communion, implement one of two options:

Option 1: Offer “communion in one kind” by just offering the bread and not participating in intinction (dipping in the cup). The liturgy will be the same, with the consecration of both elements and the enduring symbolism, but no contact with the actual cup. This practice has been deemed valid by church tradition. Also, seek to employ communion servers who are under 70 years of age. Let this be a good opportunity to engage our youth members into service. Have servers wear gloves. Drop the bread in hand.

Option 2: Suspend the observance of Holy Communion in all services until further notice.

E. Remind people that they can participate either by attending church services “live” through the church web page (www.fairhopeumc.org) or Facebook Live or from the service archive at their convenience. Communication can happen on-line as well, by leaving comments, needs requests, prayer requests, etc. that will be read, answered, and attended to by church staff.

F. Have finance team delay as many expenses as possible. Encourage online giving.

Level 3— Emergency Management (COVID-19 sends the community into emergency mode with many people in quarantine)

A. Follow the school schedule and/or the local health department to determine church closure. Assure the congregation that as much of church life will continue as possible.

B. Promote the “Facebook live” broadcast of all services. Consider providing other “live” offerings for Bible studies. Small groups and church business meetings will be carried out on Zoom or other platform.

C. Let people know if they have any needs to contact the church and we will do our best to work with local authorities to meet their needs.

D. Monitor the church phone and keep a list of all infected people and call to monitor their progress.

E. Prepare and mobilize teams trained in “standard precautions” to assist the local health department delivering food and medicine, as needed. The pastoral care team should offer no personal contact but continue support in other ways. Only the clergy team (with consultation with their physician taking into account their age and health status) should make emergency hospital visits, being careful to follow the protocol of the hospital.

F. Maintain a ministry of prayer for all affected. Make plans for the prioritization/ possible suspension of member funerals.

G. Have the finance team transition into a very conservative mode, only spending money on necessities as prioritized.

H. Explore contingency plans for using church as community quarantine space.

Communication remains the key as in any situation. Reassurances that we are NOT panicking, but responding to educated guidance in the situation for preparedness from official channels, and trusting God in His provision are important messages.