

# PREPARING Your CHURCH for Coronavirus (COVID-19)

A Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and  
Faith-Based Planning Manual

# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
STEP 1: Get Organized	4
Actions: Start with Prayer, Reflect on Scripture, and Build on Existing Ministries and Activities	
STEP 2: Create a Pastoral Team	7
Actions: Establish Guidelines for Pastoral Team, Recruit Team Volunteers, and Define Roles and Responsibilities	
STEP 3: Develop a Communications Plan	11
Actions: Identify Effective Communications Platforms, Focus on Communicating with Vulnerable Groups, Advocate for Others, Share Trusted Information Only	
STEP 4: Focus on Church and Community Outreach	17
Actions: Focus on Marginalized Individuals and Communities	
STEP 5: Strengthen Preparedness Through Collaboration	20
Actions: Work with Other Churches and Consult with Denominational Bodies	
STEP 6: Adapt to Changing Needs	22
Actions: Consider Modifying Practices, Adapt Services and Stay Informed	
REFERENCES	25

This manual has been adapted from the original, with permission from the authors of “Humanitarian Disaster Institute (2020). *Preparing your church for coronavirus (COVID-19): A Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and Faith-Based Planning Manual*. Wheaton, Illinois: Author” by members of the Western Cape Ecumenical Network Task Team, Outliers, and The Warehouse Trust for distribution to member churches and church bodies to assist with preparing local congregations for a rapid response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

# Introduction

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7)<sup>1</sup>. As we begin, let's start with prayer. Let's pray throughout the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak. Public health emergencies like the COVID-19 can cause fear and anxiety. Prepare, but don't panic. This passage reminds us that, in every situation, our prayers ground us in God's peace. We step forward with faith: God is with us as we seek protection and discern how best to love our neighbors.*

The Church in Africa and South Africa has a strong history of community mobilisation to bring about societal change and coordinated care for vulnerable and marginalised communities. The Church's ability to tackle stigma, to offer integrated care for those affected and infected by various conditions, to network effectively with key stakeholders, to replace messages of fear with messages of hope, and to mobilise resources across social, religious and political divides has been proved time and again. We are invited once again to demonstrate this creative, powerful and sacrificial love through our unified response to the current crisis.

This guide was prepared to help United States churches plan and prepare for COVID-19 and has been adapted, with permission and local input, to a South African context. The authors have drawn on biblical wisdom and their team's research to share insights and best practices from their collaborative work with local, state, and public health agencies.<sup>2</sup> The team's experiences with helping churches around the globe for nearly a decade have also informed this guide.

Church planning and preparedness should not be developed in a vacuum. It's important to recognize that each church has its own history, culture, and approach to ministry. Successful church planning and preparedness should also acknowledge the unique risks each community faces, as needs vary from region to region and church to church.

A plan is a tool. It doesn't need to be large or detailed in order to be useful. The goal of having a plan is not to turn your church into a mini-public health agency, but rather to incorporate public health preparedness into your ministry. If you are spending more time creating a plan than working on ministry, it may be too large or complicated, and it probably means it won't be feasible to implement or sustain.

## Benefits of having a Church Preparedness Plan

By preparing your church for COVID-19 through building on the knowledge, talents, gifts, and resources that already exist within your congregation and community, you community can benefit in the following ways:

- Builds on your church's existing ministry.
- Does not require a new program or large investment of resources.
- Makes it easier to maintain and sustain your plan and preparedness activities.
- Provides flexibility for adapting as needs change over time.
- Allows you and your church to act quickly.
- Helps counter fearful panic with faithful preparedness and planning.
- Helps to deepen our expression of church as we love our neighbours.

### Some Reasons Church Preparedness Plans Fail

- The plan is not clearly aligned with the mission or theology of your church.
- The church leadership does not model or communicate the benefit of preparedness.
- Preparedness activities are developed in isolation from the other programs or ministries of your church.
- Preparedness depends on the energy of one or a few people.
- Actions require resources (e.g., money) that may not be available or attainable.
- The church doesn't recognize, support, or encourage the people working hard to help the church prepare individually or publicly.

In each of the following chapters, you will find a Scripture reading and reflection, easy-to-use planning instructions, concrete preparedness examples, planning templates, and prayer.

This manual will be most useful if you continue to add new ideas and adjust regularly as you learn more and respond to changing circumstances. As you implement your plan, be sure to consider how your church might help care for vulnerable and underserved individuals and communities. Also be sure to consider how to care for health, spiritual, psychological, and emotional needs in your congregation. Remember to keep it as simple as you can while responding to a complex situation.

*Prayer: God, guide us into and throughout this process with your peace.*

# Step 1: Get Organized

*They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh...to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine* (Genesis 41:35-36). Joseph demonstrated wisdom in preparing for and then leading the way through a severe famine. Because of his careful preparation, Joseph could then provide what people needed. Though our focus isn't food, faithful preparation for COVID-19 involves planning ahead of time and then managing through a crisis. This planning guide is designed to help you take a faithful approach to assessing the needs, being good stewards, and witnessing to God's love for our neighbors.

## Action: Start with Prayer

Prayerfully reflect on how God might use your church in light of COVID-19. Consider how your church's unique resources and current ministries might be used to help those in need. Also, pray for guidance about how the most vulnerable in your congregation and your extended community might be helped. Ask God to open your eyes to ways you might help amidst concerns over COVID-19.

## Action: Reflect on Scripture

The way we plan to respond to COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity to draw on theology that leads to critical, reflective action. The good news is that your church probably has a robust theological foundation for grappling with common problems like fear, adversity, and helping others. Use this theological understanding to help guide your church planning and preparedness efforts. Connect with others who are sharing theological resources.

## Action: Build on Existing Ministries

Rather than starting from scratch, begin with what your church is already doing to serve others. Identify the current ministries and activities your church is engaged in that could be used to help address the impact of the COVID-19. Use existing communications methods and programs to instill hope in response to concerns about COVID-19. Advocate on behalf of the marginalized and vulnerable in our society, caring for peoples' spiritual, emotional, physical, social, and safety needs.

## Questions to Help You Get Organized

- **Is your church new to this type of work?** Starting small and learning as you go is the best practice. Initially, we recommend you develop a highly focused plan that is realistic about what your church is able to do quickly and do well to address COVID-19 concerns and needs. As your church grows more prepared and you begin to see what works and doesn't work for your church, then begin to explore ways to expand your preparedness efforts.
- **Does your church have operations that can be incorporated into your COVID-19 plan?** Ministries to groups like young families, the elderly, and the medically infirm can easily be integrated into your preparedness plan. Do you have a food program (like "Meals on Wheels"), an outreach to immigrants or refugees, or an education program? These can be ideal places to start when developing a preparedness plan. Before COVID-19 directly impacts your community, you could leverage each of the example ministries just highlighted to provide education about the outbreak and share information about additional resources available. You can also ensure contact information is updated. If your community is eventually advised to avoid contact with others outside the home, you can exchange in-person visits with regular calls to check in on those you have been serving.
- **Do you have people in your church with expertise in this area?** Among your church members, are there current or previous healthcare providers, employees of local, state or county public health agencies, people who work for relief organizations, or perhaps law enforcement or other first responders? People with this sort of experience can help your church prepare. If people are too busy, consider creating special consulting or advisory roles for them.
- **Are there any special liability issues that you need to consider?** Consider reaching out to your insurance provider to see if there may be special liability issues your church should consider amidst response to COVID-19. Situations where there is a foreseeable danger can produce liability if the congregation does not make every reasonable effort to intervene or remediate the situation. Not all insurance policies are the same. Coverage amounts, deductibles, and payment caps can vary significantly. This is necessary before planning is completed, and it may protect you and your congregation from a lawsuit. Consult with your insurance professional to be sure your policy is right for you.

The bottom line is that, whenever possible, it is best to incorporate COVID-19 preparedness into things you already do. This leverages your experience, introduces some creative variety that can increase interest among people in existing programs, and allows you to avoid duplication of efforts.

## STEP 1: PLANNING TEMPLATE

Actions: Start with Prayer, Reflect on Scripture, and Build on Existing Ministries

Get Organized Checklist:	
	Regularly monitor COVID-19 risk and impact on your church and community.
	Schedule time for your pastoral team (in person or virtually) to plan, using this manual to help guide the planning process.
	Prepare to open your meeting in a word of prayer to seek God's comfort and guidance and pray for those in need.
	Share a Scripture reading and reflection to draw out biblical wisdom that can help your team plan effectively. Verses and reflections are provided at the beginning of each step in the planning guide.
	Share the manual with church staff, pastoral team, and other volunteer team members. Step 1 (Get Organized) and Step 2 (Creating a Pastoral Team) will likely overlap.
	Other:

*Prayer: God, help us listen intently for what you're asking us to do and plan realistically for what we can accomplish.*

## Step 2: Create a Pastoral Team

*But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be...there are many parts, but one body* (I Corinthians 12:18, 20). As we prepare, we're reminded that God gives us each unique gifts and opportunities to help the whole body as we respond in love to the circumstances at hand. Rather than cause fear and anxiety, let us reveal unity as we serve each other effectively. We pray God will guide us into the right roles for this moment.

### Action: Establish Guidelines for Pastoral Team

Form a pastoral task team to help lead and execute church planning and preparedness activities to address the COVID-19 outbreak. The team will need a coordinator who is passionate about how your church can prepare and care for others amidst the outbreak. Identify someone who has experience in monitoring and discerning information and leading a response team.

Successful church preparedness begins (and ends) with leadership. This involves getting key church leadership on board with your vision for how to help your church get ready for and respond to this public health emergency. It also encompasses identifying and developing the right leaders to help you carry out your preparedness activities.

### Action: Recruit and meet with Pastoral Team

When forming your pastoral task team, define the roles and responsibilities of all team members. This will help to lighten the burden on those involved and help teams work together. Ensure those who volunteer are able to commit time and be available to carry out the roles required. Ensure this team is representative of all members of the church community, particularly the elderly and youth, so that all voices are heard when drawing up plans. Forming a focused pastoral task team can help to create a sense of calm, confidence, and church community.

### Action: Define Roles and Responsibilities

Define the roles and responsibilities of each position on the team. Encourage team members to invite others to help them where possible and to identify someone who can step in for them if they should become ill or otherwise unable to play the role for a time.

### Action: Monitor COVID-19 Risk and Impact

Ensure you are connected with a trustworthy source for monitoring and assessing COVID-19 risk and communicate any updates as soon as necessary.

## How to Form a Health Team for Your Church

Your COVID-19 preparedness ministry team (a.k.a. your health team) will need a champion—a health team coordinator—someone who is passionate about how your church can prepare and care amidst the outbreak.

Successful church preparedness begins (and ends) with leadership. This involves getting key church leadership on board with your vision for how to help your church get ready for and respond to this public health emergency. It also encompasses identifying and developing the right leaders to help you carry out your preparedness activities.

The average senior church leader is already overwhelmed with a wide range of responsibilities. It can be hard for senior leadership to take on yet another role and ministry. In some cases, it may actually be easier (and better) for a lay leader with a heart for serving others in times of crisis to take the lead in getting your church prepared. Here are steps for engaging church leaders in a COVID-19 preparedness ministry:

- Choose team members who will be calm and informed, such as health care professionals.
- Identify a health team coordinator.
- Ensure this team represents, or is able to lead and communicate effectively with, the different parts of your membership, ministries, and community.
- Ensure at least one staff member is either on the health team or is the designated liaison to the health team.

## STEP 2: PLANNING TEMPLATE

Actions: Establish Guidelines for Pastoral Team, Recruit Team Volunteers, and Define Roles and Responsibilities

Add as many people who are necessary to prepare and respond well, while remembering this team will likely need to make quick, informed decisions.

### Pastoral Team Coordinator and Back-Up Contact Information

Coordinator	<input type="text"/>
Key responsibilities	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>
Back-up coordinator	<input type="text"/>
Key responsibilities	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>
Authorized emergency spokesperson	<input type="text"/>
Key responsibilities	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>

### Pastoral Team Members: Contacts and Skills (to be completed by each team member)

Name	<input type="text"/>
Position (role at church, home, or company)	<input type="text"/>
Key responsibilities on pastoral team	<input type="text"/>

Home address	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Social media	<input type="text"/>
Email address	<input type="text"/>
Emergency contact	<input type="text"/>
Relationship	<input type="text"/>
Emergency contact phone	<input type="text"/>

Name	<input type="text"/>
Position (role at church, home, or company)	<input type="text"/>
Key responsibilities on pastoral team	<input type="text"/>

Home address	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>
Social media	<input type="text"/>
Email address	<input type="text"/>
Emergency contact	<input type="text"/>
Relationship	<input type="text"/>
Emergency contact phone	<input type="text"/>

*Prayer: God, may we identify the right people for the right roles, and may we support each other along the way.*

## Step 3: Developing a Communications Strategy

*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline* (2 Timothy 1:7). We're reminded in this passage not to cower in the face of a potential emergency. Nor are we to panic. By faith, we can act with the power, love, and self-discipline that comes from God. With this as our guide for crisis communications, we can rise to the occasion to provide steady and supportive information. Your church should open the channels of communication regarding COVID-19. Provide church staff, leaders, and congregants with access to the plan so they can understand its components and how to act. They need to know what to do in advance, not only to get them through an incident, but also to help alleviate panic and anxiety.

### Action: Strengthen Communication Platforms

Ensure that all contact details, including email addresses and mobile telephone numbers are up to date. Consider creating a Whatsapp Broadcast group for quick sharing of important updates, ensuring that only vetted information is shared. Identify a primary contact number for congregants to call or Whatsapp should they have any concerns about their health risk or of someone with whom they may recently have had contact. This is especially critical for determining whether to self-isolate or present to a doctor for testing. A person(s) on the receiving end of the messages should be authorised by the Pastoral Team to advise congregants whether or not to refer to a health care professional.

### Action: Be Intentional in Communicating with Vulnerable People

Remember that many in your community may lack access to certain forms of technology, so be sure to discuss how you will stay in touch and support potentially vulnerable members of your church and community. In South Africa, Whatsapp is readily available to most people. Ensure that what is communicated is sensitive to all who may be affected, guarding against further marginalization of individuals.

### Action: Draft Messages

Consider writing template letters in advance so you are not composing messages during the confusion and chaos of crisis. For example, you can draft an email about canceling services, though you don't know if you will need it. This will give you time to think through the tone and the message you hope to send. Also, think through the logistics of the tools you would use to live-stream, send a video or reflection, or however you plan to respond. Decide in advance if and how you might work with media if they contact you about how your church is navigating COVID-19.

## Communication Platforms to Consider

**1. Emails.** Many congregations will have an email database for sending newsletters. If you have this set up, it allows for quick sharing of information. Older members of your congregation, though on the database, however, may not read emails regularly nor have ready access. Identify these members in advance, and call them directly if necessary.

**2. Whatsapp broadcast group.** This is the most effective way to disseminate information to large groups in South Africa. Care should be taken to ensure that only vetted information is shared. Avoid sending any information that is not absolutely necessary so as not to overwhelm people, as this will reduce the effectiveness of this form of communication.

**3. Text messaging.** This service uses less bandwidth and many text messaging servers will continuously attempt to send the message until the cellular signal is restored.

**4. Social media networking communications.** Examples of how social media can be used before or during public health crises include posting communications, sharing information, downloading resources, updating news, sharing geographical location, and taking or sharing pictures of developing events. To stay consistent and current in an emergency, follow your state-certified local public health department on social media and use their messages during an emergency.

**5. Call-Down procedure (telephone tree).** Identify congregants who would be more responsive to telephone calls than Whatsapp messages. When a broadcast needs to go out to all congregants, ensure that these members are covered by telephone calls as well. Divide up this list of congregants to members of the pastoral team.

## How to Help Anxious and Worried Members of Your Church

A quick skim of headlines reveals that panic has already been triggered, as evidenced by stock-piling groceries and toiletries and buying up of protective equipment that isn't needed or useful against COVID-19. Not surprisingly, many pastors and church leaders have begun sharing about members of their church who are struggling with high levels of anxiety and worry about the outbreak. Following is a handout that you can give to members of your church who are struggling.

## COVID-19 HANDOUT: CHOICES YOU CAN MAKE TO STAY EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY

### Pay Attention to Your Body and Your Emotions

It's natural to experience stress and anxiety in the face of a threat we cannot control. Because every person reacts differently, notice what your body and emotions are telling you:

- Listen to your emotions, noticing any anxiety, sadness, anger, or detachment;
- Listen to your body, noticing any change in appetite, new aches and pains, or feeling particularly hot or cool; and,
- When you notice troubling symptoms, pause to care for your body and mind. If you become unable to manage or function well, seek the assistance of a professional.

### Embrace Best Health Practices

Though there's much about the COVID-19 outbreak over which you have no control, you can choose to embrace the kinds of practices that will keep you and your loved ones safe. The Center for Disease Control suggests:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

### Access Reliable Resources

You can choose how you will receive and consume information about the outbreak. If you rely on panicked phone calls from your anxious loved ones, you're likely to suffer more than if you choose to rely on credible sources. Two reliable sources for health news include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization. Also, if you become consumed by breaking news about the spread of COVID-19, you can also choose to step away from media reports for a time.

### Share Reliable Information

Another way to care for yourself is to care for others by sharing the best information you've discovered. When you find a reputable resource that's particularly helpful, share it with a loved one. When you learn about practices that keep people safe, let a relative who is vulnerable to illness know. In a culture where people are feeling anxious, you can be a gift to others.

*Continued on next page*

### **Practice Self-Care**

In the midst of a stressful season or situation, many self-care practices are the same ones that prove helpful in everyday living:

- Maintain your normal routines.
- Connect with family and friends.
- Eat well.
- Stay active.
- Get adequate rest.
- Do enjoyable activities.
- Employ coping skills that nurture your spirit, like mindfulness exercises or prayer.

### **Support Each Other**

We aren't created to go through extreme stress alone, so this is also a time as part of God's family to care for each other. Here are two questions to keep asking yourself:

- What opportunities do I have to help others?
- What is overwhelming right now that I should ask someone for help with?

While it feels like there is a lot we can't control amidst concerns over COVID-19, every one of us can make choices to stay emotionally healthy.

### STEP 3: PLANNING TEMPLATE

Actions: Identify Effective Communications Platforms, Focus on Communicating with Vulnerable Groups, Advocate for Others, Share Trusted Information Only

What should you communicate?	Who are you communicating to? (Ex: congregation, staff, local government)	Who should communicate the message? (Ex: Pastoral Team Coordinator, Pastor)	How should it be communicated? (Ex: electronically, phone call/tree, mail)	Preparatory Actions (Ex: talking points, key messages, training)
Impact on church to date				
COVID-19 Impact				
Church services or gatherings (e.g., Bible studies) offered or changed				
Funds or supplies needed				
Volunteers needed				
Other				

Directions for updating the church voicemail, including remotely:

Persons Responsible:

Alternate:

Directions for sending churchwide emails and texts, including remotely:

Persons Responsible:

Alternate:

Ensure you are clear with the church how you will use these different channels of communication. For example, how will they connect if the Sunday morning service is canceled? And also consider that different people may have different tools available (e.g., some may not have access to a computer or email address).

Additional communication directions:

Instead of using a “prayer chain” model, some churches may decide to divide a list of vulnerable people who need to be checked in with regularly among staff and team members. For example, each person would get a list of several people who they are committed to check in with daily or every other day.

### Check-in List

Person Responsible name and number:

Check-in recipient name and number:

Check-in recipient name and number:

*Prayer: God, free us to lead our communication not with fear, but with power, love, and self-discipline.*

## Step 4: Focus on Church and Community Outreach

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing* (Proverbs 12:18). When it comes to potential public health emergencies, thoughtful, true, and timely communication is key. Proverbs reminds us that quick and reckless words can damage. As we inform our congregations and communities, both before and during potential crises, we ask God to give us the wisdom and resources we need to communicate well.

### Action: Provide Vetted Information from Trusted Resources

Make prevention education and outreach part of your everyday ministry. Share up-to-date, trusted, and vetted information on COVID-19, information that fosters preparedness rather than stoking fear. Look for ways to share helpful updates and information. Programs such as health education can be a service your ministry offers that goes beyond the COVID-19 outbreak. Things to consider include:

Provide information from local, state, and public health agencies on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

- Educate others on infection prevention habits, like proper hand-washing techniques and other common practices frequently taught to combat spread of infectious diseases.
- Teach infection control strategies at meetings and events, like reminding others to stay home if they feel ill or are starting to feel ill.
- Post flyers and reminders of healthful habits, including “cover your cough” and “stop the spread of germs.”
- Disseminate information regarding infection control measures throughWhatsapps, emails, phone messages, text messages, handouts, social media platforms, and your website.
- Partner with local, state, or non-profit organizations to provide training on good infection control measures. This could be conducted in person or online through webinars, for example.
- Include inserts in the worship bulletin that encourage preparedness and/or provide steps for developing and implementing a preparedness plan.
- Include preparedness messaging with other congregational announcements.
- Regularly set aside a segment of time during meetings or worship services for updates on COVID-19.
- Post informational flyers in your building or on your website and social media.
- Have the pastors and other church leaders publicly show their support of planning and preparedness.
- Develop a sermon or sermon series focusing on theological issues related to preparedness-related topics. If you do, please share these with others.
- Encourage small groups to study biblical examples of preparedness together.

### Action: Focus on Marginalized Individuals and Communities

COVID-19 is likely to disproportionately impact the socially and economically vulnerable. God has called us to care for the vulnerable. This preparedness ministry is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our muscles to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with others. If you need help with this, consider connecting with organizations like The Warehouse Trust, who have developed resources and tools to assist us to do just this.

- Older people are especially vulnerable to this virus. We can focus on reducing their risk of exposure and also plan, for example, to provide extra social support (by phone, computer) if your community moves into a phase of significantly reduced social contact.
- Children and families with limited resources may rely on school meal programs as a significant source of food security. If schools close, it will be important to help ensure these children and families get enough food.
- People with immuno-compromised health and respiratory illness are especially vulnerable, so we can work to support them in holistic ways.
- People whose income will or already has dropped quickly (for example, service jobs, travel industry, small businesses relying on social connection) is another group for whom the church should be paying special attention as you plan.

#### Outreach Examples

- Include inserts in the worship bulletin that encourage preparedness and/or provide steps for developing and implementing a preparedness plan.
- Include preparedness messaging with other congregational announcements.
- Regularly set aside a segment of time during meetings or worship services for updates by congregational leadership on COVID-19.
- Post informational flyers in your building or on your website and social media.
- Have the pastors and other church leaders publicly show their support of planning and preparedness.
- Develop a sermon or sermon series focusing on theological issues related to preparedness-related topics.
- Encourage church small groups and your other ministries to study biblical examples of preparedness together (this could be done in person if safe to do so or via virtual small group meetings).

*Prayer: God, help us to reach the people who need our help the most.*

## STEP 4: PLANNING TEMPLATE

### Actions: Focus on Marginalized Individuals and Communities

Select a few of these services from examples below that you will provide to underserved church members and communities and describe how each will be carried out:

	Sample Outreach Actions	How Action Will be Achieved
	Church staff and team members model preparedness	
	Promote faithful preparedness (e.g., in Sunday school, sermons, Bible studies)	
	Disseminate vetted information from trusted resources to reduce panic	
	Pastoral services (spiritual care)	
	Outreach & support to vulnerable populations	
	Advocacy	
	Health services	
	Home visits/or calls if advised against meeting in person	
	Language translation	
	Legal assistance	
	Listening	
	Managing volunteers	
	Managing donations	
	Food services (cooking, feeding & distribution including home delivery)	
	Improve access to community healthcare services	
	Special or alternative worship services (e.g. streaming)	
	Encourage individual/family preparedness	
	Other:	

## Step 5: Strengthen Preparedness Through

*But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it* (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). As Christians, and as a church, you are part of one body which highlights both the need for and the strength of collaboration and working together. As the passage says, the “parts should have equal concern for each other.” We know we need each other. A crisis is a time both to help and be helped.

### Action: Work with Other Churches

Working with other churches allows you to make connections locally, regionally, and even nationally or globally. These connections allow you to share knowledge and resources and to learn from others. Talk with other pastors from churches in your area to discuss the possibility of working together. Consider the following topics:

- Discuss how COVID-19 could affect your community.
- Explore ways you might collaborate with other churches. This could include national, regional, and local denominational bodies to which you’re connected.
- Discuss ways to share, and avoid duplicating, your efforts.
- Create a simple plan for coordinating and sharing resources and for filling potential gaps.
- Identify the contact person for each church, plus a backup person, in case the main contact is unavailable. Include multiple ways to contact this person.

### Preparing as the Full Body of Christ

Look for ways to partner with other churches and to leverage the strengths of multiple churches in order to enhance capacity. Your church may have an incredible ministry and people who know how to work well and care for children. Another church may have a heart for working with the elderly. When we come together as the full body of Christ, we make even a larger impact than if we try to respond by ourselves.

## STEP 5: PLANNING TEMPLATE

### Actions: Work with Other Churches and Consult with Denominational Bodies

Use the following checklist to consider ways your church might plan to build collaborations to help better prepare:

	Sample Collaborative Actions	How Action Will Be Achieved
	Connect with a network of other churches that shares preparedness ideas and resources.	
	Identify other churches or agencies in your community who are working on preparedness to learn from, consult, and network.	
	Host a webinar or seminar on how to prepare for COVID-19 for your church and community members (or consider joining one of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute's limited run of weekly webinars on preparing churches; visit <a href="http://wheaton.edu/hdi-covid19">wheaton.edu/hdi-covid19</a> to learn more).	
	Other:	

*Prayer: God, help us recognize and lean into our need for each other.*

## Step 6: Adapt to Changing Needs

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22). In this verse, James reiterates one of his central points: that faith without action is incomplete. In a similar way when preparing for a potential crisis, we need to listen well when creating a plan. We need to pray without ceasing. We need to do the work of putting our preparedness plan into action. Implementing our plan is a practical way to ensure that our faith, love, and actions line up.*

### Action: Consider Modifying Practices

Churches offer significant social support that enhances resilience, yet when it comes to public health emergencies like COVID-19, this can actually put churches in a high-density outbreak region at greater risk. As central gathering places, churches need to think through how typical patterns of coming together put people at risk. For example, think about how worship practices and greeting times may need to be changed to limit exposure.

When considering communion, different churches may be less or more hesitant to adapt practices. What is important is to be asking: How can we make communion more hygienic while spiritually ministering to people now? How can we both encourage those who don't feel well to stay home, while also continuing to minister to them? At what point do we make more radical changes or suspend communion?

For example, if you use a "common cup," this could be the time to start preparing communion in individual disposable cups. Perhaps your congregation already does this. However, if you are passing the cups via communion trays from person to person down the pew, it increases risk. The same holds true for similar practices that require passing objects from one person to the next, such as collection plates. Explore modifications to practices that could reduce the number of "touches." If you are a faith leader who decides to implement some changes to typical practices, make sure you take time to communicate the reasoning and process that went into the conclusion.

### Action: Adapt Services where Needed

Now is the time for church leadership and members to put plans in place to inform attendance and closure decisions should they be needed at some point. Church leaders should begin talking about possible ways to adapt to COVID-19, which includes alternative meeting approaches if the church body is unable to gather. For example, some churches already stream services or communicate with each other over social media, and that may be an option for fostering community if meeting

in person is not possible.

In these cases, however, don't forget those in your church who may be homebound, unable to afford technology or lack access to it, and those who are not as tech-savvy. Also, some in your church might struggle if your church doesn't gather because they lack a strong social network outside the church. In such cases, it could be helpful to bring back the "prayer chain" call approach and have people check in regularly by phone. Though there aren't any perfect solutions, and although these discussions can be difficult, it's better to have them now versus later.

If you anticipate that alternative meeting and worship approaches might be needed, be sure to talk with your staff how they might work remotely. Similarly, you should talk with your staff about how your church will navigate potential employee absences.

South Africa's Government has asked all bodies to restrict gatherings of over 100 people and to implement special precautions in the case of smaller gatherings. People have also been encouraged to reduce transportation by air, rail, bus and taxi as much as possible. These instructions need to be followed with care and creativity. Follow the guidelines and instructions provided.

### Action: Stay Informed

Stay informed by following updates disseminated by local, state, and public health agencies is key to putting preparedness into action. Seek out and listen to trusted sources that have been monitoring COVID-19 and issuing updated information, resources, and recommendations. Partnerships between faith-based organizations and public health agencies can help save lives.

Visit <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>, the South African Department of Health website dedicated to information on COVID-19.

Save the Emergency Hotline Number 0800 029 999 on your mobile phone.

Send "hi" to the WhatsApp Support Line 0600-123456 for latest updates.

Connect with the WCEN. Join the Whatsapp Broadcast group via this link

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/C7tki6XSGSJ10Lad8Ke6Qe> OR

join the Telegram Public Channel <https://t.me/WCENCOVID19> OR

send an email to [wcencovid@warehouse.org.za](mailto:wcencovid@warehouse.org.za)

Visit [warehouse.org.za](http://warehouse.org.za) and [outliers.org.za](http://outliers.org.za) to find out more.

## STEP 6: PLANNING TEMPLATE

**Actions: Consider Modifying Practices, Adapt Services and Stay Informed**

Implementation Checklist	
	Regularly monitor COVID-19 risk and impact on your church and community..
	Assess your church's activity and progress toward helping your church and community prepare.
	Make gaps in your plan and preparedness known to other leadership so that you can work toward solutions.
	Revisit your plan regularly and update the plan so it remains viable.
	Continue to communicate your plan as it changes to church members and partnering churches and agencies.
	Other:

*Prayer: God, lead us to be do-ers, loving our neighbors out of gratitude for your love for us.*

## References: About the authors

1. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™
2. Portions of this guide have been adapted from the Public Health Planning Guide for Faith Communities that was originally developed by the Humanitarian Disaster Institute, Cook County Department of Public Health, and Chicago Department of Public Health. Original language from Bloomington Public Health. L. Brodsky, M. Drews, K. Henslee, N. Kafumbe and M. Schweizer, “Ready, Set, Go! Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Toolkit.” Produced by the City of Bloomington (MN) Public Health Division with the support of the Minneapolis - St. Paul Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), 1800 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55431, [www.bloomingtonmn.gov](http://www.bloomingtonmn.gov) This material appears in modified form in Disaster Ministry Handbook by Jamie D. Aten and David M. Boan. Copyright 2016 by Jamie D. Aten and David M. Boan. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)
3. This section adapted with permission from M. Starbuck. (2020, March 3). How to Stay Emotionally Healthy During the Coronavirus Outbreak [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/202003/how-stay-emotionally-healthy-during-the-COVID-19-outbreak>  
Original language from Bloomington Public Health. L. Brodsky, M. Drews, K. Henslee, N. Kafumbe and M. Schweizer, “Ready, Set, Go! Faith Community Emergency Preparedness Toolkit.” Produced by the City of Bloomington (MN) Public Health Division with the support of the Minneapolis - St. Paul Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), 1800 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55431, [www.bloomingtonmn.gov](http://www.bloomingtonmn.gov) This material appears in modified form in Disaster Ministry Handbook by Jamie D. Aten and David M. Boan. Copyright 2016 by Jamie D. Aten and David M. Boan. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)



### About the Humanitarian Disaster Institute

Founded in 2011, Wheaton College's Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) is the country's first faith-based academic disaster research center. Our mission is to help the church prepare and care in a disaster-filled world. HDI carries out our mission through research, training, convening, and resourcing.

HDI offers an M.A. in Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership at Wheaton College Graduate School that can be completed in one year on campus or two years online (which includes a week of on-campus coursework at the beginning and end of the program). We have also partnered with the School of Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy at Wheaton College Graduate School to offer a new Trauma Certificate in a specialized track specifically tailored to humanitarian and disaster responders. Learn more at [wheaton.edu/HDL](http://wheaton.edu/HDL).

### Contributors

Jamie Aten, Ph.D., is founder and executive director of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute at Wheaton College. Follow on Twitter at [@drjamieaten](https://twitter.com/drjamieaten) or visit [jamieaten.com](http://jamieaten.com).

Kent Annan, M.Div., is director of Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership at Wheaton College. Follow on Twitter at [@kentannan](https://twitter.com/kentannan) or visit [kentannan.com](http://kentannan.com).

### Citation

Humanitarian Disaster Institute (2020). *Preparing your church for coronavirus (COVID-19): A Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and Faith-Based Planning Manual*. Wheaton, Illinois: Author.

### Contact Us

Our website and social media accounts provide ongoing updates and resources for preparing your church for COVID-19. For more resources:

Website: [www.wheaton.edu/hdi](http://www.wheaton.edu/hdi)

Email: [hdi@wheaton.edu](mailto:hdi@wheaton.edu)

Facebook: [facebook.com/WheatonHDI](https://facebook.com/WheatonHDI)

Twitter: [twitter.com/WheatonHDI](https://twitter.com/WheatonHDI)

Instagram: [@wheaton\\_hdi](https://www.instagram.com/wheaton_hdi)

Shared for informational purposes only by:

Humanitarian Disaster Institute  
501 College Avenue  
Wheaton, IL 60187

This manual is presented as a sample for informational purposes only and should not be relied on in any way without consulting an attorney. Neither the sharing of this document for informational purposes nor any comments made in reference thereto are intended to constitute legal advice and no representations or warranties are made regarding the effectiveness or suitability of this manual for any particular purpose or in any particular jurisdiction. Neither the Humanitarian Disaster Institute nor any of its representatives or agents shall have any liability to you (or any other party) resulting from, or arising in connection with, your discussions, review, or distribution of the manual. This manual was prepared by the Humanitarian Disaster Institute for the benefit of churches worldwide and legal questions regarding same should be directed to your local counsel or may be directed as follows:

Meghan Terry Davis  
Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP  
122 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1220  
Chicago, Illinois 60603  
312-786-2250  
mdavis@htlaw.com

*Hoogendoorn & Talbot's attorneys have a strong commitment to promoting justice and building social capital through the charitable sector. At the forefront of serving not-for-profit and charitable organizations, we represent numerous civic, religious and educational institutions, community foundations (both local community and faith-based) and private foundations. We provide valuable corporate, governance and tax advice and counsel from the start of an organization's life through incorporation and maturation and, at times, to its end through merger or termination. For more information about Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP, please visit [www.htlaw.com](http://www.htlaw.com) or call (312) 786-2250.*