



National  
**Benevolent**  
Association  
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



## A Statement of Compassion and Care Concerning the Coronavirus Outbreak

### Our Faithful Approach

The emergence and spread of the respiratory disease, coronavirus, or [COVID-19 as designated by the World Health Organization](#), has faith leaders wondering about their role and response. At such times, we are reminded of how interconnected our global world can be and how important it is to approach one another with an ethic of compassion and care.

We sometimes focus on the numbers and the maps, yet we are reminded that each reported case of the virus has behind it a person, a family, a community. We are connected globally and our compassion and care reaches out to the full human community. The church is called to be in prayer for those affected, those caring for the affected, for those valiantly trying to diagnose and treat patients, and for the development of strong partnerships across international communities in order to effectively prevent, detect and respond to this virus. As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we offer our prayers for healing and support for all affected.

“As a church body, we need to pray. Pray for those infected by the coronavirus in China and around the world, for those who care for them, for health specialists and authorities who are combatting the spread of infection, and of course for all who at this time are feeling anxious,” offers Linda Manns, a Parish Nurse at Loudon Avenue Christian Church in Roanoke, Virginia.

We offer continued thanks for the medical professionals, concerned citizens, and governmental and non-governmental entities across the world that are actively advocating for an effective and appropriate response.

### Informed and Thoughtful Response

It is important during such a dynamic global event, that we, as the church, also take the time for an informed and thoughtful response. The need for urgency can be fertile ground for fearful reactions. As we try to go about our daily routines, we may even begin to see others through a lens of skepticism, judgment, and fear. In global health crises such as this, we must be attentive not to place blame on particular individuals or communities. We know too well in the histories of the U.S. and global communities how discrimination and isolation develops towards others or those deemed as “other” (e.g. immigrants, the economically poor, targets of religious prejudice, and religious minorities, to name only a few). We encourage faithful response that is informed by medical and mental health professionals and reflective of our theological identities that we care for all.

One antidote to fear can be information and planning. We encourage the sharing of guidelines for preventing the spread of the virus. Please share prevention strategies with your congregations and communities. While it is tempting to rely on social media outlets for the most up to date information, please be aware of the amount of misinformation that is also shared through these same outlets. In other words, do the research with accredited professional organizations as listed in the resources section below.

## Compassionate Coordination and Planning

Additionally, you may be concerned about church events, including your regular worship and the rituals involved in church life. Once you are well prepared with information about preventative measures, make a response plan for your congregation or organization. One starting point is to gather leadership and craft a plan that works for your community. It is important that you assess the risks with all available information, make thoughtful proactive decisions, and communicate those decisions as widely as possible. Some elements that go into a response plan may include:

- **Assessment:** For example, consider how you manage regular tasks such as serving communion, nursery care, and other congregational life events and make determinations on what to change based upon [recommendations from the Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#). A fuller list of tools can be found in the resource section at the end of this article.
- **Decision Making:** Clarify within the community which individuals will make the decisions about the preventive measures to be used in worship, at events, and in the broad life of the church. Is this the pastor? The pastor and elders? The Board of Trustees? Be clear about that line of decision making and communicate to the broader congregation this decision chain.
- **Communication:** Create a clear and comprehensive communication strategy related to sharing decisions made. The CDC and local emergency management offices offer frequent updates. Do be mindful of sharing with those who may be the most vulnerable in your congregation or faith community. For instance, if you decide to cancel a meeting, determine who communicates the decision including the rationale and the subsequent next steps. Designate a point person(s) to receive the questions that come through phone calls, emails, or even in person. Ensure that all community members know who to contact when questions and inquiries arise.
- **Pastoral Care:** Create a plan to provide care and support for those affected in your setting. How will pastoral care be offered? How will relevant and appropriate information be shared about those affected? When communicating with community members, be mindful of [healthcare privacy laws \(i.e. HIPAA\)](#). When adding individuals to prayer lists be attentive that specificity can cause fear and unnecessary worry.
- **Crisis Management Plan:** There are multiple resources for crisis management plans. We encourage leaders to do appropriate research, contact your regional office, and make plans before a crisis emerges. Please reference the resource section below for helpful tools.

## Additional Faith Responses for Church Leaders

- **Create spaces for storytelling and person-to-person sharing:** There are other ways church leaders can play a role in calming fears and guiding the community towards responses that embody care and compassion. One way to do this is to help people see the stories behind the numbers. In the reference section below, an [article from Emory University](#) illustrates how to share the stories of those affected. We can listen within our own communities for stories that remind the church that we are first a community of compassion and care and that fear can undermine our ability to be that kind of community. What are the connections in your own community to those who are affected? How might we create spaces where people share their own and their family's stories?
- **Be mindful of prejudices that can surface during moments of fear:** Let us be mindful of the racial and potentially racist overtones and attitudes that can be present in public accounts of the Coronavirus. As the Coronavirus expands across multiple countries and parts of the world, we know that communities are in need of our solidarity and support in these times of being vulnerable. Let our faithful response be centered in compassion and care rather than fear, isolation, or division.



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- **Educate and calm fears:** Faith leaders can help educate and calm fears, providing information about risk assessment and best prevention practices. This can happen in worship, newsletters, public bulletin boards, and educational settings. Seek the wisdom of parish nurses and medical professionals within your congregation and community as their professional training provides an informed understanding that can be shared.
- **Create spaces for prayer:** Use pastoral prayers, prayer meetings, and other opportunities to encourage prayer for those suffering, those responding, and those seeking to mitigate the harm caused by the Coronavirus.

*This faithful statement was created in collaboration with the Office of General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion, and the National Benevolent Association.*

#### **Office of General Minister and President (OGMP)**

The OGMP provides leadership for the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. While encompassing many responsibilities within the Church, the OGMP's focus is on providing support for the General Minister and President in her duties as the pastor and chief executive officer. [disciples.org/ogmp/](https://disciples.org/ogmp/)

#### **National Benevolent Association**

Serving as the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. [nbacares.org](https://nbacares.org)

#### **Week of Compassion**

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of our Church. It is a ministry of the whole Church, reaching those in need "around the world, around the year." Any time we respond to a need in the world, we bear witness to the unity of our table, faithfully sharing the gifts that we have as an expression of Christ's love. In working together with partners, we represent the Disciples of Christ commitment to unity, making our resources reach farther and growing our impact on a global scale. [weekofcompassion.org](https://weekofcompassion.org)



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## Resource Section

These references are provided for the usefulness of the information. The CC(DOC) does not necessarily endorse the entirety of each organization listed.

### Crisis Planning and Health Information

- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), "Crises In Your Church: A Guide for Congregational Planning to Handle the Unexpected." <https://disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2009CrisisCommunications.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020." <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>
- World Health Organization, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public." <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>
- Catholic Health Association of the United States, "Ministry hospitals care for the first coronavirus patients in the US." <https://www.chausa.org/publications/catholic-health-world/archives/issues/february-15-2020/ministry-hospitals-care-for-the-first-coronavirus-patients-in-the-us>

### Church Rituals and Public Safety

- Washington Post, "Sip from the common cup? On Ash Wednesday, coronavirus and the flu have religious leaders tweaking rituals." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/02/26/sip-common-cup-ash-wednesday-coronavirus-has-religious-leaders-tweaking-rituals/>

### Prejudice and the Coronavirus

- Columbia Journalism Review, "The new coronavirus and racist tropes." <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/covid-19-racism-china.php>
- The Economist, "The pathogen of prejudice: The coronavirus spreads racism against—and among—ethnic Chinese." <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/02/17/the-coronavirus-spreads-racism-against-and-among-ethnic-chinese>
- The Jakarta Post, "Stop prejudice, the novel coronavirus has no race." [www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/02/22/stop-prejudice-the-novel-coronavirus-has-no-race.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/02/22/stop-prejudice-the-novel-coronavirus-has-no-race.html)
- This is a very good article that helps remind us that this is effecting real people and an ethic of care is essential as we talk about this virus. Emory University, "Coronavirus, Community & Compassion." <https://news.emory.edu/features/2020/02/coronavirus-community/>

### From Disciples-Related Health and Social Service Partners

- "Coronavirus Disease 2020: What You Should Know." Linda G. Manns, RN, MSN, Loudon Avenue Christian Church. <https://www.nbacares.org/files/file/resource-ppt-coronavirus-response-linda-mann-parish-nurse.pdf>
- "HIPAA, Privacy and Care of Church members," Jonathan Webster, DMin, BCC. <https://disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013HIPAAexplanationJonathanWeber.pdf>