



Congregational Planning Checklist for a Pandemic

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This is a supplement for you and your congregation on how to plan for the impact of a pandemic in your church. A pandemic is something many of us have not experienced. Our goal at Lutheran Disaster Response is not to prepare you completely for a pandemic outbreak, but to give you a handle on what might occur and how to keep your congregation running if such a disaster occurs.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Create a committee to develop, plan and maintain a pandemic preparedness and response plan.
Notes:

- Determine, to the best of your ability, the impact on your congregation's usual activities and worship.
Notes:

- Determine the impact on education programs.
Notes:

- Determine the impact on administrative meetings.
Notes:

- Determine the impact on mission work.
Notes:

- Determine how a pandemic would affect the outside resources on which your church depends (i.e. mailing, travel, etc.).
Notes:

- Determine what will happen if the pastor, church staff, and church school teachers and staff are not able to perform their duties.

Communication, communication, communication

- Communicate and educate your staff and members about the pandemic.
- Distribute information to your congregation about the pandemic: how it is spread, symptoms, how to protect oneself, etc.
- Share information frequently about the church's response plan with the congregation.
- Participate in the activities of the community's pandemic plan.
- Understand different roles of federal, state and local public health agencies, and know what to expect from each in case of a pandemic.
- Work with individuals in public health and emergency response to share preparedness plans and assign a contact person to communicate with them.
- Assist local emergency responders and health care facilities to improve availability of advice and timely health care service.
- Develop tools to communicate information about the pandemic's status and your church's actions.

Before a pandemic occurs:

- Consider adding a conference call line to the current telephone system at the church for meetings in case of quarantine.
- Consider starting an online church group at Skype, Facebook or other social media platforms.

Plan for worship and education activities to be provided electronically (e.g. internet, phone)

- Create a list of possible lay worship leaders.

- Create a list of lay leaders who can call on affected people.

- Create a list of individuals willing to teach church school.

- Provide an information session on respective duties for all interested lay individuals.

- Test the church's response with a simulation or drill, and then evaluate and revise the plan.

Notes:

Other planning matters:

- Check the source of the church's water supply; make sure to know when water is and isn't safe to drink.
- Be prepared to write a letter to the mayor expressing your concern if your city is not preparing well enough.
- Make sure the staff's life insurance is up to date.
- Remind the congregation and staff to keep individual wills up to date.
- Remind staff and the congregation to always follow instructions given by public health officials.
- Identify the local/state authority that is responsible for declaring public health emergencies.
- Make sure information given is sensitive to language barriers, reading abilities and to people who have disabilities.
- Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your staff and members.
- Plan for staff absences.
- Evaluate access to local mental health and social services.
- Identify those with special needs and include them in your response plan. Establish relationships with them so they know what to do in case of a crisis.

Set up policies and protocol for staff and church

- Set up non-penalized policies for staff leave in case of personal illness or to care for an ill family member during a pandemic.
- Set up a mandatory sick leave policy for staff suspected to be ill or who become ill at the worksite.
- Make sure employees know they are to remain at home until they are symptom free and ready to return to work.
- Set up flexible work-from-home hours.
- Identify regular church activities that could contribute to the spreading of the virus and teach the congregation proper etiquette that prevents disease transmission.
- Follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's travel recommendations.
- Set up procedures for activating the church's pandemic response.
- Allocate resources to protect your staff and members.
- Promote respiratory hygiene as well as cough and hand-washing etiquette.
- Consider efforts that provide services that are most needed during a pandemic: mental/spiritual health, social services, etc.
- Create a succession plan in case pastoral and congregational leaders are unable to perform their duties for an extended period of time.

Coordination with external entities

- Coordinate with external organizations to help your community.
- Contact the synod bishop's office to communicate a response.
- Contact the Lutheran Disaster Response affiliate coordinator in your state: _____.
- Contact local ecumenical partners and/or VOAD or COAD partners to offer aid or to ask for help and share a plan.
- Consider volunteering your facility for overflow sites for local hospitals to provide a contingency hospital or a site for feeding vulnerable populations.
- Work together with other faith-based organizations to plan for a pandemic.

Notes:

For additional resources, please see the following sites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html
- World Health Organization – who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
- Lutheran Disaster Response's Congregational Disaster Preparedness Guidebook can be a useful resource for step-by-step planning process – download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Congregational_Disaster_Preparedness_Guide_Lutheran_Disaster_Response.pdf?ga=2.116588161.643590776.1583259371-1225870290.1577208539