

THE WYOMING DISTRICT

Mountain Sky Conference
The United Methodist Church

March 15, 2020

Dear Wyoming Pastors:

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus. We find ourselves in quickly changing times, and it is hard to keep up both with the news and what our responses as pastoral leaders should be. On Friday evening, Bishop Karen Oliveto sent out an email recommending that all churches suspend all worship services and meetings through the end of March while we all continue to monitor the transmission of COVID-19 (Coronavirus). Bishop Oliveto did not make this recommendation lightly but after considerable consultation with officials. On Saturday, several of us participated in a conference call with the Governor's Office. He and his officials suggested that all faith leaders follow what's happening both at the national level (CDC.gov), state level (health.wyo.gov), and at the local level (check your county government's website). All these sites offer sound advice, and we can provide more if needed.

Yet, even in the last 24 hours, there have been new developments. Today, the Governor recommended all schools across the state close until at least April 3rd. Also, the CDC has released new guidelines on the gathering of groups. The CDC is urging a ban on all meetings of over 50 people (down from the previous recommendation in 250). While many of our church gatherings are still under 50, I believe it's important to remember most of our church members attending those gatherings are in the high-risk group for this disease. Therefore, I urge all churches to end in-person meetings at least for the next two weeks. Also, I urge you to keep in touch with your local health departments and stay current on reports released by our state government.

In his call on Saturday, the Governor emphasized that faith communities have an opportunity to reach out to those most vulnerable in our society: the elderly and those with health conditions. He encouraged faith leaders to consider how to provide tangible ways to help. Plus, faith communities can help those who will struggle financially during this turmoil. While it is not advisable to gather as we have, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to minister to our congregations and communities.

We find ourselves in uncharted territory. How might we continue to support the persons in our communities during this time? How do we inspire hope, support, and kindness? While we may no longer offer in-person worship experiences, the primary connection point for our church people, we now wrestle with a fundamental question: ***Now what?***

Here is my conviction: God is still at work in our communities, and so can we be. Ministry is not shuttered. It continues. It is just shifted into other spaces and means. How? Let me offer a few suggestions, and let's start a conversation on how to develop these ideas. We do know that not all churches have the same technology available. That is why we offer these suggestions in 3 categories: High-Tech, Mid-Tech, and Low-Tech.

WORSHIP & BIBLE STUDIES

High Tech – Share worship and bible studies by live-streaming, Facebook live, video recording, or Zoom. While some of these options require equipment and subscriptions, others are relatively free. Some churches already put their worship service on Facebook with not much more than a smartphone and a small tripod.

Mid-Tech – If the above streaming services won't work for your congregation, consider a conference call where members can call in from their phone and listen to a devotion and prayer time with you. There are free conference call services available.

Low-Tech – If the conference call does not work, mail a devotion each week to your members.

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PASTORAL CARE

High Tech – Zoom meetings may be an option but may not be as helpful as a phone call.

Low-Tech – Call, call, call. Put together and use a phone tree to communicate across your congregation. Please be especially attentive to your at-risk people (those over 70; those with health concerns that put them at further risk). Ask what they need. Ask how the church might help. (Delivering groceries, for example.) The time you may have spared from in-person meetings should be put to connections with your congregation in this way.

Also, Low-Tech – Send notes of care and encouragement via mail.

MISSION

Schools across the state will likely soon be out if they are not already. Will they still provide meals? Call and find out. If not, how might we? To reduce the risk, small groups (less than 10) could put together sandwiches, while taking precautions (wearing gloves, etc.), and hand them out in drive-by stations at the church or the school (with school administration's permission). Knowing your community, ask: What other needs will this crisis create that the church can address?

STEWARDSHIP

Our churches still need donations. Bills still need to be paid.

High Tech – research and implement online giving or giving-by-text and communicate with your church that this option is available.

Low Tech - mail church-addressed stamped envelopes to the congregation or contributors list. Describe how you are shifting ministry, not closing it, how they can participate, and the need to support the church's ministry. Ask for usual gifts to still be given.

STAFFING

The social distancing measures Bishop Oliveto has recommended is to minimize contact within gatherings where people are near to each other and can, therefore, transmit the disease - especially since many of our congregations are made up mostly of people in the at-risk category. But work must continue. Limit gatherings, but staff can report to work as needed – with some precautions in place. The Denver Office has a rotating staff schedule for the office, including social distancing (6 feet apart) and regular cleaning and hand-washing, etc. If your church only has a small staff anyway, this can be managed relatively easily.

What other questions do you have? What other ideas do you have to share? Attached is a list that was shared by Traci Smith (<http://www.traci-smith.com/covid-19-100-ideas-for-ministers-and-ministry-leaders/>). You can visit this link yourself, but we have included these 100 ideas and added some web links that might be helpful.

We have an opportunity to be the light of Christ in an anxious time. Stay in contact with us (Laura, Jeff, Joy) on questions, needs, or solutions you have. We will share as much information as we can as we receive updates in this quickly-changing situation. Thank you for your ministry and your leadership of your congregations, especially in this very anxious time.

Yours in Christ,
Jeff Rainwater
District Superintendent

Laura Rainwater
Congregational Resource Minister

Ways to Keep Your Church Community Running

From Traci Smith

<http://www.traci-smith.com/covid-19-100-ideas-for-ministers-and-ministry-leaders/>

1. [Zoom](#) Conferencing for worship, meetings, or discussion (<https://zoom.us/pricing>)
2. Facebook (or Instagram) [Live](#) Broadcasting LiveStream of Facebook [Live](#)
3. Group Text Messaging / Group Chat (using [GroupMe](#) or [Remind](#))
4. [Facebook Groups](#) for Book Studies and Bible Studies
5. YouTube channel or [Broadcasting](#)
6. Blog Posts with Comments (I use [WordPress](#))
7. Use [Twitter](#) to communicate and stay in touch
8. Telephone Conferencing (Here's a [free](#) resource) (<https://www.freeconferencecall.com>)
9. Take Prayer Requests Online or on the phone, and have a virtual prayer meeting
10. Google Video Chats for Small Group/Pastoral Care Meetings (<https://hangouts.google.com> is one way; perhaps you know about <https://duo.google.com>)
11. Make a SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>) or Google Form to find out how people want to connect online
12. Ask everyone to light a candle at the same time and post photos on Instagram, Facebook.
13. Host a photo challenge (I'm thinking of something like this [Lenten](#) one)
14. Make sure people can continue to give to the church remotely ([Simple Give](#) offers a \$0/month plan for churches (there is a fee per transaction), is what our church uses, but there are [others](#))
15. If you have an electronic (or other) sign, use it to post encouraging messages for the community
16. Take a look at one of these [Intergenerational Ideas](#) for young people and cross+gen community

17. Find and share articles and stories of people persevering through adversity and challenge using social media
18. Use [prefilled cups/wafers](#) for communion if you will worship in person
19. Tap into the leadership resources you already have established (boards, committees, teams) and repurpose them for what is needed right now.
20. Make sure to encourage leaders and staff to care for themselves to avoid [compassion fatigue](#) as things get more challenging.

Classic or Creative Spiritual Practices that Can Be Practiced At a Distance or In Small Groups

21. Find a [Labyrinth](#) to walk
22. Make a Post-it Prayer Wall or other community [prayer wall](#)
23. Plant a garden and post about its progress
24. Open the Sanctuary for small groups and individuals to come in and pray or light a candle
25. Encourage people to stop by your outside prayer gardens alone or in small groups
26. Tie prayer requests to fences outside of your building or make an [outdoor prayer box](#)
27. Have people pray in “shifts” over a period of time, so your community knows someone is in constant prayer
28. Set up an interactive Prayer station on [lament](#)
29. Set up some of these nature/[outdoor-themed](#) Prayer Stations
30. Read a book of the Bible together (and check-in over one of the platforms above)
31. Make a group gratitude journal either online, or somewhere everyone can contribute
32. Divide people up into prayer partners or prayer groups to meet virtually or via phone
33. Pray for the [world](#)
34. Tons more [prayer stations](#)

35. Promote the use of a daily [Bible reading guide](#)
36. Encourage use of the d365 devotional for a tremendous daily [online](#) devotional
37. Use the [Pray as You Go](#) app
38. The poetry foundation has a [poem of the day](#) that is great for centering and thinking in new ways
39. Get completely out of this world by looking at NASA's [astronomy picture of the day](#)
40. In these tense times, practice [joy](#).

Loving Your Neighbor

41. [Wash hands and practice social distancing](#)
42. Drop off food and supplies to older adults and those in isolation
43. Give a phone call to those who are staying at home, use a phone tree if you have one
44. Connect with community programs who are helping children who are out of school
45. Create an emergency fund to help people who are living paycheck to paycheck and are temporarily out of work
46. Support Asian restaurants and businesses who are facing discrimination
47. Share your abundance if you've got extra from your stockpile
48. Send cards, mail, and prayers to people at home
49. Find ways to support and nurture health care workers through prayer and providing a place of respite
50. Donate to local organizations who continue to serve the most vulnerable
51. Share ideas as a community. Who needs help? How can we help? Have an offering of service ideas on your social media
52. Offer extra support to those in your community with mental health challenges such as depression or anxiety
53. Don't label people as overreacting or underreacting. Practice [compassion](#).

54. Remember that COVID-19 preparedness helps the [most vulnerable](#).
55. Ask a mom-to-be, how you can help support her in this challenging time
56. Share reputable information, not misinformation or rumor (it can be hard to tell the difference. I recommend this [resource center](#).)
57. Check in with immigrant and refugee communities
58. Stock your church's little library or little food pantry
59. Check in with artists and speakers whose income has been severely affected by cancellations
60. Be reminded of the importance of being kind through one of these kindness [quotes](#)

Faith at Home Practices to Encourage

61. Create a [sacred space](#) at home to pray and meditate
62. Start a regular prayer practice (here's [my](#) prayer book)
63. Do one of the practices in *Faithful Families*, such as family Lectio Divina, Washing Worries Away, or starting a Nighttime Blessing Practice
64. Send home [books](#) for parents and children to read at home
65. Create a version of take out church or [church to go](#)
66. Do acts of service together at home, reaching out to those who need company
67. Spend time outside, breathing in fresh air and listing reasons to be grateful
68. Do practices from a [Faith Jar](#)
69. Bake and break bread together — talk about the parable of the [yeast](#)
70. [Watch a caterpillar turn into a butterfly](#)
71. Read from the [Family Time Bible](#)
72. Make a prayer chain with gratitude or prayer requests. Watch it grow every day.
73. Help children to feel secure and safe by using one of [these practices](#).

74. Draw or color your prayer requests. Post pictures and share with others, or mail to those who are isolated.

75. Sing a simple song or hymn together from your faith tradition.

76. Blow bubbles or fly a kite. Let them remind you of the Holy Spirit that moves in mysterious ways

77. Make origami [birds](#) or [butterflies](#) as a symbol of hope and resurrection

78. Feed the birds to remember how God cares for creation

79. Use the [butterfly hug](#) to create calm and peace

80. Remember [play](#) can be a spiritual practice

Spiritual Practices to Reduce Anxiety and Foster Peace

81. Practice a news fast. Turn off social media and news. Try looking at news only one time per day.

82. Practice the [loving kindness](#) meditation

83. [Focus on what you can control and not what you can't](#)

84. Practice [mindfulness meditation](#)

85. Practice [centering prayer](#)

86. Go outside and listen to nature sounds. Think about God's creation.

87. Print and color [mandalas](#)

88. Encourage [Mini-Sabbaths](#) in addition to a regular practice of Sabbath

89. Practice the [Daily Examen](#)

90. Practice [Lectio](#) or [Visio](#) Divina

91. Nurture a Spiritual practice of [imagination](#)

92. Make and use a [finger labyrinth](#)

93. Practice acts of [generosity](#)

94. Do [body prayer](#) or restorative yoga
95. Start a gratitude journal or practice
96. Make a prayer journal
97. Pray the "[Lord it is Night](#)" prayer before bed
98. When you don't have the words to say, light a candle instead (or turn on a battery operated one.)
99. Make and use [prayer beads](#)
100. Pick a centering word like "peace" or "hope." Write it down and let it be your intention for the day.