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NOTE: This is an interim guidance document, representing sound public health practice and information as it is currently available. It will be updated any time any new guidance is released on this topic.

OUR FAITHFUL RESPONSE: Caring For Those in Need in the Community

How these guidelines reflect faithful Christian practice:

Christians recognize that God calls us to love and care for those in need because God first loved and cared for us in our need. Many people will struggle during this outbreak. Some may have short tempers and become violent and others may experience such violence. Some may turn to alcohol or drugs to try to cope. Some may become very scared. Some may find that a chronic medical condition has gotten worse as health facilities close and people are told to stay in their households. One thing Christians can do is to check on their neighbors, remembering that in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), Jesus defined a neighbor as the person who cared for the needs of those they met.

The most important thing we can do to get through this outbreak is for us all to support each other. Together, we meet this challenge and work to stay healthy. To do, this everyone needs to offer support to the people we know and love who live in our community.

■ Women caring for and looking out for women

Some women will face the possibility of violence in their home from family members, especially when stay-at-home protocols may increase stress and anxiety.

- Create a phone network among women in the community in which members are paired together. A natural way to organize the network is through a local congregation.
 - Each woman can check in with her partner in the network at least once a day via SMS or mobile phone. Don't forget to ask about the health and safety of the children and others in the household when you check in.
 - Send a group SMS among all the members of the group at least once a week. The group SMS can offer words of encouragement and remind members to check in with one another.
 - A woman in your network may be in crisis in an unsafe household and need to leave quickly. The network could consider supporting members in such circumstances with a cash transfer mechanism (for example, people with mobile phones in Kenya can transfer money to another using a process called MPESA) to provide emergency funds to a woman in need. The network may opt for each member to pay a small amount in to a common account if such a need arises.
- If a member of the networks indicates her concern for safety in the household, the network should consider options. Can you engage trusted women in the community to speak with a religious leader, village elder, or village chief to identify a plan to address the concern?

■ Men caring for men, looking out for each other, and holding one another accountable.

Men have a responsibility to love and support their families in the midst of this outbreak. Sometimes a man can become overwhelmed and feel powerless in these circumstances. When this happens, other men in the community can offer him support. If a man acts in ways that do not express love and support to his family, other men in the community can intervene and speak with him to ensure that no one in the family is at risk of violence.

- Create a phone network among men in the community in which members are paired together. A natural way to organize the network is through a local congregation.
 - Each man can check in with his partner in the network at least once a day via SMS or mobile phone call. Ask your network partner how everyone in the household is doing. Ask your network partner how he is doing.
 - Send a group SMS among the entire network at least once a week. The group SMS can remind the men about their responsibilities to their wives, children, and families and offer words of encouragement.
- If women in the community reach out asking men to intervene when there has been an act of violence or when women or children are feeling unsafe in the home, believe their reports and do something to address the issue. The best course of action will vary from community to community. Bring together village elders, the village chief, and religious leaders to discuss the issue and figure out a plan of action together.

■ Those with special medical and social needs

Some people in the community have longstanding medical, emotional, or psycho-social needs. Examples include those with chronic medical conditions; those who regularly experience anxiety, stress, or other emotions that may cause distress; or those with physical or developmental disabilities.

- If you have a chronic medical condition, you may be at increased risk for severe symptoms from coronavirus if you become infected. This is especially true if your medical condition compromises the immune system. For this reason, maintain your treatment and medication. Many medical providers have changed their policies to provide a greater supply of medications to their patients. If possible, try to have enough medicine on hand for two to three months. Continue to take your medicine as prescribed.
- If you experience high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression, the reality of the outbreak may cause you to feel these feelings more strongly. Establish a support network of family and friends who can check in on you. Do this before the hard feelings get to be so strong and ask your network to reach out regularly as it may become difficult for you to reach out when these feelings become strong. Remember to take time to do things that will help calm you, such as meditation and prayer or spending time with your loved one in the household.
- Those with developmental disabilities may not fully understand all of the information about the outbreak that is being distributed. Make sure that you explain clearly and simply the reasons why schedules have changed and infection control guidance is being followed. Ask those with developmental disabilities whom you know if they have any questions and answer them as clearly as you can.
- Those with physical disabilities will not be able to maintain physical distances of six feet if they rely on a caregiver or family member to assist with mobility or daily needs. Both the caregiver and the person receiving care should practice infection control as stringently as possible. If a person with a disability uses equipment to assist with mobility (e.g., a crutch or a wheelchair), be sure to clean this equipment with soap and water regularly.

■ Finding alternative ways to cope

Not all coping mechanisms are healthy. The additional stress from this outbreak may mean that some of the things that you did in the past to cope with day-to-day challenges will no longer be helpful and may actually be harmful. Think about what the negative consequences of your actions might be. Here are some practical tips for coping with stress. If you have a chronic medical condition, you may be at increased risk for severe symptoms from coronavirus if you become infected. This is especially true if your medical condition compromises the immune system. For this reason, maintain your treatment and medication. Many medical providers have changed their policies to provide a greater supply of medications to their patients. If possible, try to have enough medicine on hand for two to three months. Continue to take your medicine as prescribed.

- Taking some time out. Sometimes the demands of the household or the job can overwhelm us. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and collect your thoughts to avoid responding with anger or aggression.
- Develop spiritual practices. Prayer, meditation, or reflection on sacred texts may give you a sense of peace and knowledge of God's love.
- Develop a safety plan. If you are in a household where you are fearful of violence that may happen or already has happened, have a plan in place that will allow you to seek safety in the event you need to leave the household. Where will you go? How will you safely depart (especially if there are stay-at-home orders)? Do you know the numbers for local governmental offices or non-governmental organizations that can offer assistance?
- If you struggle with alcohol or drug use, think about why you take the drugs you do. Most people who struggle with addiction end up using the drugs that offer some kind of benefit in helping them to cope. The problem is that the drug(s) have more negative consequences than benefits and the drug use causes a lot of harm. If you can think about what the drug does for you, you may also be able to think about other ways to get a similar benefit without the negative consequences. If your drug use is quite heavy, please keep the following things in mind:
 - If your community is under a stay-at-home mandate, you may find it difficult to access the drugs you normally use. Having to give up your drugs may create a lot of anxiety and discomfort for you.
 - If you have been drinking a lot of alcohol for a very long time, your body may have become dependent on the alcohol. Without it, you may experience seizures or heart troubles. If this occurs, try to seek medical help.

■ Community planning and leadership

- Collaborative planning/decision-making—make sure that everyone's voices are heard as the community mobilizes to care for those in need. In this instance, those who are closest to those in need may have more wisdom about what can be most helpful and effective.
- Responsible use of authority and trust. Some people are trusted in their local communities. This is true of elders, local chiefs, and religious leaders. Such leaders can use the trust that's been given to them to help make sure that those in the community who are most vulnerable are protected.



Caring for Those in Need in the Community

