

To: Mayor Bill DeBlasio

cc: Lorraine A. Cortés-Vázquez, Commissioner, Department of Aging
Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Oxiris Barbot, Commissioner, NYC Department of Health
Cynthia Brann, Commissioner, NYC Department of Corrections
Deanne Criswell, Commissioner, NYC Department of City Emergency Management
Steven Banks, Commissioner, NYC Department of Social Services
Carmelyn P. Malalis, NYC Commissioner, Department of Human Rights
Chauncey Parker, Deputy Commissioner for Community Partnerships
Rev. Dominique Atchison, Center for Community Partnerships
Governor Andrew Cuomo

We are a group of faith leaders representing congregations with over 25,000 New Yorkers. In these rapidly changing times, we seek information about and have recommendations for NYC responding to Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Recognizing the extreme difficulty of the situation and the rapidly-changing public health and community leads, we raise these few concerns and questions:

CONTINUITY OF PASTORAL CARE

As caregivers to our congregants and communities, we want to ensure **continuity of care** for people who are sick and vulnerable and need access to their trusted clergy. Many functions can work online. But some cases require in-person care if at all possible:

This is especially acute

- At the end of life
- For people in the hospital
- For those in detention, jail or prison. NOTE: We are deeply troubled about conditions in detention and jails and strongly encourage the Mayor to exercise his executive authority to immediately release people who are especially vulnerable to this illness, and to parole all "criminally low-risk" and people jailed for low-level crimes.
- For undocumented New Yorkers who rely on clergy support around interactions with DHS and ICE

Clergy will need guidelines and protocols for in-person ministry:

- appropriate numbers of people to gather if at all
- contact precautions to observe
- anything else that we need to know to protect each other.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

The mayor indicated in his 3/17/20 press briefing that a decision on “shelter in place” is coming in the next 48 hours. If enforcement plans for travel within the city are implemented, it will be crucial to

- identify clergy who do not require isolation to be able to move about the City and have access to people, especially as they become ill.
- use existing databases, such as the [official list of marriage officiants](#) maintained by the City Clerk’s office to identify clergy. This list has already been considered, authorized and vetted with certified materials from our authorizing ecclesial bodies along with articles of incorporation for our congregations, etc. This list is a start.

TESTING

We stand with first-responders and caregivers, who include clergy. As NYC ramps up its testing capacity:

- it will be critical to expand testing beyond the current guidelines which are too narrowly defined.
- we clergy can be vectors of the illness - as many already have been across the country - and most do not qualify for coronavirus tests. We need to ensure as much as possible that as we offer care we are not infecting ourselves or our people with this virus, and as such hope to be considered as first responders, as is possible, receiving priority testing, if requested.

ACCESS TO VOLUNTEER HELP

Many of our congregations include people recently out of work due to the many closures:

- Some can help with public health measures and should be engaged as volunteers or hired in an expedited process.
- Some can volunteer to help with Meals on Wheels, City Harvest, and other food programs to ensure nutritional access. Having clear coordination and protocols from the City will be crucial.

- We urge the City to appoint a coordinator/coordination team of volunteers for efficient mobilization. The [HELPNowNYC model](#) is instructive and can be replicated for responders beyond medical personnel.

Know that we send these recommendations and questions with a sense of concern, care and gratitude for all that you are facing in these times. Please know that you can draw on us as conditions develop. You are in our prayers.

Sincerely yours,

Pastor Kaji Douša, Park Avenue Christian Church, New Sanctuary Coalition
Rabbi Barat Ellman, Children of Abraham, Martin, Malcolm, Ella & Rosa (CAMMER)
Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Emerita, Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives
Rabbi Joshua Stanton, East End Temple
Reverend Dr. Jacqueline J. Lewis, Middle Collegiate Church
Reverend Amanda Hambrick Ashcraft, Middle Collegiate Church
Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, Lab/Shul NYC
Reverend Lea Matthews, St Paul & St. Andrew
Rabbi Heidi Hoover, B'ShERT: Beth Shalom v'Emeth Reform Temple
Reverend Stephanie Kendell, Park Avenue Christian Church
Rabbi David Evan Markus, Temple Beth El of City Island
Rabbi Mackenzie Reynolds, Chaplain
Rev. Dr. Damaris Whittaker, Fort Washington Collegiate Church, UCC
Rabbi Lisa D. Grant, Ph.D., Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Rev. Micah Bucey, Judson Memorial Church, New Sanctuary Coalition
Rabbi Mira Rivera, Board-Certified Chaplain, Romemu
Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg, Malkhut Queens
Dr. Michael Bos, Marble Collegiate Church
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Rev. Valerie Anne Ross, Nazarene Congregational, UCC
Rabbi Hara Person, Central Conference of American Rabbis
Cantor Lisa B. Segal, Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives
Rev. William Critzman, West End Collegiate Church, UCC