

COVID-19 TOOLKIT FOR CHURCHES



PSALM 46, NIV

'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.'

Globally, this is an unprecedented moment for the modern church. As COVID-19 rapidly spreads, with nearly every country affected, you have the opportunity to play a vital role. Pastors around the world are adapting to this unexpected time and diligently serving their communities.

Churches are at the centre of community and have a central role both in guiding their community toward behaviour change and providing spiritual, pastoral and practical support to those in need.

You play a critical role in preparing your community for the onset of the COVID-19 threat, in promoting healthy behaviour to reduce the spread, in tackling stigma and fear and in providing practical care for the most vulnerable.

This resource is built on principles and best practices from World Vision's **Channels of Hope** programme, used around the world during the Ebola crisis and around issues in their communities, such as Child Protection, Gender, HIV and AIDS and Maternal Newborn Health. Since its inception in 2003, more than 400,000 faith leaders in 68 countries have been trained across the different areas. For more comprehensive guidance and a look at how World Vision is equipping church leaders in vulnerable communities worldwide, refer to the **COVID-19 Guidance for Faith Communities & Places of Worship**.

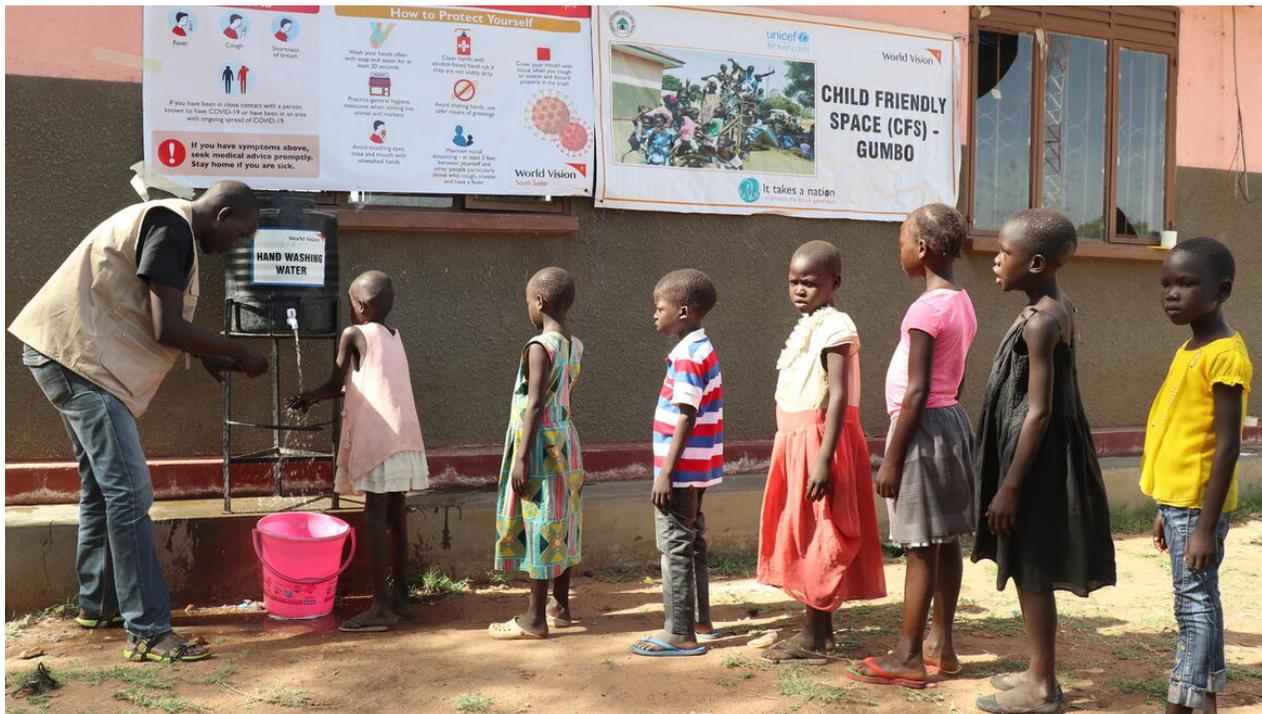
IN THIS GUIDANCE, YOU WILL FIND INFORMATION THAT WILL HELP YOU TO:

- Understand behaviours and practices that you can undertake to protect your congregations and those most at risk.
- Understand how to provide safe spiritual and pastoral care and support.
- Understand who is at the greatest risk from COVID-19.
- Ensure that faith & pastoral workers teams maintain their presence as agents of spiritual and pastoral care in a way that both themselves and those in need of their help.

Each faith community and wider geographical area is in a different stage of responding to the coronavirus. Wherever you are at, it is our prayer that we may all lean on God during these troubling times and that this guide would equip you to lead well despite the ever-changing circumstances.

We are praying for you, for strength and peace, as you respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS



1. **Protecting your staff and congregation:** Protect your communities through improved hygiene, increased cleaning of hard surfaces and physical distancing practices.
2. **Giving accurate information:** Stay abreast of the latest information, prevent the spread of misinformation and discourage sharing of rumours.
3. **Planning ahead:** Prepare a Continuity Plan for your faith community to undertake if stricter recommendations are brought in regarding physical distancing and public gatherings.
4. **Connecting and caring for your community:** Ensure care of the vulnerable and elderly, support and care for carers in the community, identify communication channels and ensure support for those not connected via telephone.
5. **Providing psychosocial support to families and wider community:** Care for those in your community by remaining calm and listening to their needs.
6. **Providing spiritual nurture:** In the event of physical distancing, plan ways to connect virtually with your community and encourage digital fellowship.
7. **Remembering your own self-care:** Keeping you and your pastoral staff healthy and preventing burnout should be a top priority during this unprecedented and stressful time.
8. **Equipping families to disciple their children:** When schools and churches are closed, it may be necessary for parents to teach and disciple their children in new and creative ways.

ACTION 1 >



PROTECTING YOUR STAFF AND CONGREGATION

- > **Hygiene practices:** Promote good hand and respiratory hygiene, including handwashing with soap, at all gatherings. Ensure plenty of soap and/or hand sanitiser dispensers are available for use. Thoroughly wipe down all surfaces that people touch regularly using a bleach base cleaner.
- > **Adjust spiritual practices:** Depending on the stage of the epidemic, we advise reducing the sharing of any cups, bowls and cancelling in-person services. Discourage any physical contact (like handshakes or hugs) when meeting in person.
- > **Physical distancing:** When appropriate and necessary, cancel gatherings and in-person services. Transition your church service online and encourage your staff to work from home during the week. As physical distancing shifts your ministry, connect digitally with your staff and congregation via phone, email, Zoom, social media and more.

ACTION 2 >



GIVING ACCURATE INFORMATION

- > **Lead by example:** More than you may realise, your congregation looks up to you and other church leaders. During such a time as this, they put their trust in you. Model for others how to show up without panic and take care of their health.
- > **Fight stigma and blame:** The most hurtful response to infectious diseases is how people suddenly treat others with suspicion. Speak up on behalf of the vulnerable, the excluded and those from other ethnic groups while applying the health measures needed. Also, remember that people can be infectious before they present symptoms.
- > **Be informed:** Stay aware of the latest information and guidance on the COVID-19 outbreak by regularly referring to the [**World Health Organization \(WHO\)**](#) main coronavirus website. Make sure you know where to find your local health department guidelines and stay healthy yourself.
- > **Prevent the spread of misinformation/fake news:** Talking about myths can inadvertently spread them. Better not to give airtime to misinformation: give correct information and messages regularly.

ACTION 3 >



PLANNING AHEAD

Though your community might not be affected by the coronavirus currently, things are changing rapidly. It is advisable to prepare a ***Continuity Plan*** for your faith community.

- > **Health team:** Gather a team of people (staff, elders, laypeople, etc.) to inform what this period looks like. While they shouldn't be responsible for every decision, they can guide and assist as your community adapts to changes.
- > **Immediately:** Increase hand and respiratory hygiene for any in-person gatherings. Find ways to increase physical distance between people and thoroughly clean hard surfaces as frequently as necessary.
- > **Additional steps:** If and when cases are seen in your area, public and private gatherings over a certain size will be cancelled. Have a plan for communicating cancelled activities to your community and be prepared to move services/meetings online. Ensure you have the equipment necessary for such a transition. Also, create a list of people in your community to check in with regularly. This includes any high risk individual and those without family local. Have someone call them at least once a week.
- > **Stricter recommendations:** If your geographical area issues a stay at home mandate, all gatherings of any size will be cancelled. Develop a plan for moving all activities possible online and have a plan for continuing fellowship in a virtual way. Check in with any leaders (small group leaders, children/youth leaders, etc.) and ensure they have the tools and plans necessary to carry out any activities digitally during this time.

ACTION 4 >



CONNECTING AND CARING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Faith communities often carry a huge burden of community-based care for the sick. Ensure your people are prepared in terms of information, protective equipment and accurate information about the correct approaches for caring for infected persons.

- > **Vulnerable people and families:** Ensure the care of the vulnerable and elderly. As these people may need to connect with services (such as getting to hospitals or buying groceries) curate a list of ways your congregation can support them.

- **Available services:** Consider having someone research and document what services are available related to healthcare, food and resources for the unemployed. Finding people that can help your vulnerable population navigate these resources is also important.
- **Connecting people:** Although a crisis may lead some people to withdraw, it can also be a significant opportunity to pull together and support each other. *If physical distancing measures are enforced, this could mean in-person gatherings are discouraged and you will have to connect virtually.*

ACTION 5 >



PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO FAMILIES AND WIDER COMMUNITY

- **Remain calm and be a non-anxious presence:** Stay calm. Be emotionally present but free from anxiety. This will build trust and provide the right kind of care in any crisis.
- **Provide psychosocial support for children:** Be present with and listen to children. Provide structure, routine and clarity about what is happening around them.
- **Listen in love:** No matter what turn a crisis takes, the most powerful gift we can offer is to listen. People need compassionate listening when they feel overwhelmed by uncontrollable circumstances.
- **Help people take the long view:** Remind people that God's loving presence was here before the universe itself, and it will be here long after the universe has passed away. Seeing ourselves as part of a much larger picture, and in the hands of a loving God, offers hope.
- **Keep values alive:** Lean into God's sustaining presence, loving our neighbours and facing death with the same purpose and values by which we faced life.
- **Pray:** Spoken prayers for people who are anxious and in great need can reshape a situation's meaning. We participate in God's life and one another's lives by showing up, by meditating in silence and renewing our sense of purpose.

ACTION 6 >



PROVIDING SPIRITUAL NURTURE

- > **Be present, even if it's not in person:** Physical distancing is a key way of preventing the spread of this epidemic, but as faith leaders we can still be present. It is not the same as being able to reach out and hold a hand, but connecting digitally and virtually will nurture the community.
- > **Reduce overcrowding:** If your worship space is prone to overcrowding, offer additional services and limit head count; encourage attendance at different times.
- > **Creative & digital outreach:** If wider physical distancing occurs, find ways to spiritually support your community during a stressful and frightening time – use newsletters, email, text messages or digital outreach methods. If your government advises against in-person gatherings, consider live streaming services or recording prayers, devotionals and sermons to distribute digitally.
- > **Consider the particular needs of children:** Develop Sunday School lessons. Ensure children and youth can virtually connect with each other or find other means of continuing to engage with their peers.

ACTION 7 >



REMEMBERING YOUR OWN SELF-CARE

- > **Self:** Prioritise keeping yourself healthy (physically, spiritually and emotionally) as you care for others in this season. Take time to do what you need to be energised and filled. Find people in your life that you can be vulnerable with in this time. Turn to a trusted mentor or friend that can commit to caring for you.
- > **Your family:** As you care and tend to those in your community, the people closest to you can help ground you. Lean on your family for support as you navigate this new time while also ensuring they are also being cared for and encouraged.
- > **Your spiritual life:** Set aside time and space each day to be in God's Word, reading the scriptures. Spend time in prayer regularly, lifting up your community and those affected by the coronavirus. And, enjoy this curated [Spotify playlist](#) of worship songs. Take a walk or spend time listening in place of communal worship.
- > **Structured time:** Just as your community is adjusting to a new normal with a set schedule, so should you. Schedule time for yourself, time to be with your mentor, your family and friends, and God.

ACTION 8 >



EQUIPPING FAMILIES TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

- > **Family activities:** Empower parents in your congregation to creatively teach their children or start a church-wide program to engage people from a distance. World Vision curated their [free family resources](#) for you to adapt and use.
- > **Talking with children:** Equip and empower families with the tools they need to share information with children in [age-appropriate ways that they can understand](#).
- > **Stay connected:** If unable to meet physically, identify ways your Children and Youth ministries can stay connected, either meeting virtually or sending videos or notes of encouragement from ministry staff and volunteers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



[Link to fuller F&D Guidance](#)



[Curation of F&D devotionals](#)



[Prayer resource](#)



[Resources for families](#)



[Resources for going online](#)



[Resources for contingency plan](#)



[Spotify worship playlist](#)



[Handwashing video](#)

WORLD VISION'S COVID-19 RESPONSE AROUND THE WORLD

World Vision has been responding on the ground since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, meeting critical needs around the world. We are responding in every country we work in, collaborating with local authorities, hospitals, academic institutions and NGOs to prevent the spread of the virus. Our response to the most vulnerable people is centred on 17 countries where we are focused on prevention of transmission, supporting health responses and caring for children made vulnerable by this crisis.

- In January, World Vision began distributing protection equipment and supplies in Asia, where the virus outbreak was first recorded. Teams on the ground are supporting vulnerable communities by promoting prevention behaviours, offering essential health advice and psychosocial support and engaging government health authorities.
- Further action is now underway in some of the world's most fragile contexts including Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Haiti and Syria. World Vision is urging governments to support a united global effort to protect the most vulnerable by rallying support particularly for those who host refugees and displaced children.

WORLD VISION'S RESPONSE FOCUSES ON THREE AREAS:

- 1. Promoting preventive measures to stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 by targeting households and communities.** This includes promoting things like handwashing and respiratory hygiene, isolation, and good family and community water, sanitation and hygiene behaviours. We are able to do this through our community partnership with health workers and volunteers, setting up public handwashing stations and distributing soap, sanitizer, and masks appropriately.
- 2. Supporting health systems and workers by providing them with personal protective equipment** such as masks and gowns, treatment supplies such as thermometers; training and equipping community health workers to help with home care for the sick; sharing stay-healthy messaging; and helping to run isolation centres or support the transportation of the sick and testing supplies.
- 3. Supporting children made vulnerable by COVID-19.** This includes assisting Ministries of Education with home learning, if schools are closed, by providing school materials and activity packs; supporting the protection of children; preventing the separation or stigmatisation of children during treatment and isolation; providing psychological first aid; and delivering livelihood activities and cash, food and care packs to people in isolation.

 For more information on World Vision's response to COVID-19 in specific countries and ways to pray, download this [***Global Prayer Guide***](#).

JOIN WORLD VISION IN PRAYER



The full recovery for the thousands of people around the world who are currently infected with COVID-19 and for comfort and peace for the many people who have already lost loved ones.

Psalm 34:18
Isaiah 43:2



Wisdom and discernment for those working to find a vaccine and for leaders entrusted with decision-making authority to be united.

James 1:5



The peace and love of Jesus Christ to cast out all fear for World Vision leaders and staff during this time, especially those with current travel and response obligations in vulnerable communities.

I John 4:18



Our Global Health Emergency Response leaders and staff as they focus on the development of clear interventions in countries in which we serve.

THANK YOU

Over the last three weeks, you've practised the postures of Surrender, Generosity and Mission in your prayers.

We hope that these rhythms from Infitum will become part of your daily life and that you continue these practices and join community Hubs through the Infitum app. Take what you've learned during this experience and let it transform your walk with Jesus, now and always.

As the world navigates this uncertain time and everyone adjusts, we will be praying for you. God is with you and all those affected by this outbreak. God can use all experiences, including suffering, as an opportunity to grow and transform our faith. **See what others are praying for in the midst of COVID-19 and share your own prayers using #HopeOverFear on social media.**

We ask that you continue to join us in prayer for World Vision's work, those who are most vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis, and for the children, families, and communities that we serve.