

March 13, 2020

## Allegheny East Conference Coronavirus Action Plan *Updated April 2, 2020*

In response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Allegheny East Conference, after prayerful consideration, legal counsel and consideration of best practices, is outlining the following measures detailed below to promote the safety of our churches, schools, and surrounding communities.

Please note that this action plan reflects where we are now, but it will be adjusted and updated as the situation develops.

### Gatherings

- All churches are to be closed to gatherings until further notice.

The closing of the church for gatherings includes specials services. This restriction also applies to unplanned services such as funerals. Churches will receive at least one-week notice prior to our church facilities being permitted to open for gatherings.

- Furthermore, in an abundance of caution, ALL congregations are to find alternate ways to worship other than gathering at the church or the usual meeting place until further notice. Some of those alternatives include the following (we will be offering additional suggestions over the next two weeks):
  - Live streaming, video conferencing, free conference calls, etc.
  - The use of small groups (recommended not to exceed 10 persons) which do not violate travel restrictions and/or advisories by local and state authorities.
  - Work groups at the church (e.g. live streaming team or treasury staff) are to follow the guideline of groups 10 or less.
  - **If someone within a small group has been diagnosed with COVID-19, (or is exhibiting symptoms), they should not gather until they have been issued a clean bill of health from their doctor and must follow all governmental/ conference guidelines for reintegration in public spaces.**
- **Drive-in Worship Services: We are requesting our churches refrain from conducting drive-in worship services until after AEC administration has been able to formulate guidelines. Information is forthcoming.**

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

In our desire to protect the constituents of AEC, the administration of AEC called for the closing of our houses of worship for services and other large gatherings (including more than 10 persons). This decision is not intended to cease all ministry by church members.

Many of our churches provide essential, life-preserving functions for the community, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable. These services include food pantries and soup kitchens. Therefore, AEC administration encourages these ministries to continue, as long as, volunteers understand their risks, meet in work groups of less than 10, and practice safe social distancing both in preparation for ministry, as well as serving. This includes using personal protective equipment (gloves and masks) and adhering to all local and state guidelines. Where possible, we ask that you obtain written permission from state and/or local authorities to perform said functions.

**Soup kitchens are no longer allowed to serve food from inside the church building. All meals should be prepackaged and made available for pick-up outside in a secure location.**

### **PERSONAL MINISTRY**

We also want to clarify our position on the personal ministry of our constituents during this time. Right now, is a great opportunity to show the love of Christ to our neighbors, fellow believers, seniors, and those who live alone. We can continue to practice social distancing while still engage others by:

- Calling
- Texting
- Emailing
- Video chatting
- Porch deliveries of groceries or supplies

Although we are worshiping corporately through other means (telephone, social media, live streaming, etc.), we are still called to minister as Jesus says in Matthew 25:35-36 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' We not only have a responsibility to minister in these very personal ways, but this time of COVID-19 represents a tremendous opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

### **Youth Volunteers**

During the COVID-19 crisis, community service volunteers under the age of 18, must be accompanied by their parent or guardian.

### **General Preventative Measures**

- Practice social distancing, keeping at least arms distance between you and another person.
- Seniors, individuals with compromised immune systems, etc).

- Refrain from handshaking, fist bumps, or hugs
- Wash hands frequently
- Use sanitizer regularly

### **Congregational Exposure**

- In the case that you or someone in your congregation contracts the virus, please notify your congregation, as well as AEC's Risk Manager, Chauna-Kaye Pottinger (ckpottinger@aecsd.com).
- Please do not share the individual's name.

### **Alternate Giving**

- Remember to encourage online giving during this time.
  - If your church is not yet set up for AdventistGiving, please go to AEC's website at [visitaec.org/treasury](http://visitaec.org/treasury) to download and complete the application.
  - In the interim, you may direct churches to make donations to the Allegheny East Conference Church on the AdventistGiving website. This can also be accessed from AEC's website under the "Give" tab.
- If there are those uncomfortable with online giving, they should contact their local treasurer to explore other options.

### **Elementary Schools**

- Until further notice, all of our AEC school buildings are closed, and students are engaged in distance learning led by their teachers.
  - **Baltimore Junior Academy (Baltimore, MD)**  
Closed until April 24th
  - **Calvary (Newport News, VA):**  
Closed for the rest of the school year.
  - **Dupont Park (Washington, D.C.):**  
Closed until April 27th
  - **Ephesus Junior Academy (Richmond, VA):**  
Closed for the rest of the school year.
  - **George E. Peters (Adelphi, MD)**  
Closed until April 24th
  - **Hillside (Harrisburg, PA)**  
Closed until April 6th
  - **Jessie R. Wagner (Pine Forge, PA)**  
Closed until April 6th.
  - **Pine Forge Academy (Pine Forge, PA)**  
Closed until **the remainder of the school year**
  - **Sharon Temple (Wilmington, DE):**  
Closed until May 15th.
  - **Trinity Temple (Newark, NJ)**  
Closed until further notice

## **Wilbert F. Mays (Teaneck, NJ)**

Closed until further notice

- The regional spelling bee and STEM fair have been postponed.
- AECOE will continue to monitor state restrictions to make decisions regarding reopening of schools and graduation ceremonies.

### **Pine Forge Academy**

- **PFA Board of Trustees voted to close Pine Forge Academy campus for the remainder of the school year.**
- The academy is engaged in an online academic program.
- AECOE will continue to monitor state restrictions to make decisions regarding graduation ceremonies.

### **Conference Office**

- The AEC Office building is closed until further notice.
- Employees are currently telecommuting and primarily communicating through phone and email.

### **Conference Events**

- All conference-sponsored activities and events have been suspended through the month of April.

### **International and Domestic Travel**

- All school and church-sponsored international trips are to be cancelled until further notice.
- International travel for all employees is restricted.
- Use of public transportation such as planes, buses, and ride-share are discouraged during this time.
- If travel is absolutely necessary to an area in which there is a known outbreak, prior approval must be obtained from Administration and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- If you have travelled outside of the country or to areas with reported cases, you should self-quarantine for 2 weeks upon your return.

### **Communication Protocol**

The pastor of each congregation is the primary source for communicating information to members.

**A “Pastor’s Guide to Emergency Response Planning During a Pandemic” has been drafted by our Risk Management office and will be disseminated to pastors, Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> followed by a webinar discussion on Monday, April 6<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 PM to review the document.**

Each church should appoint a safety officer (or designee) and a communication person to monitor the local news in the respective areas and update the church's website and social media pages with pertinent information.

In addition to the specific measures listed above, please do not neglect to be diligent in prayer. President Fordham is asking that we commit to 1 minute of conference-wide prayer every day at 12 noon, as well to pray at least three times each day.

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." -Philippians 4:6*