

March 13, 2020

Allegheny East Conference Coronavirus Action Plan *Updated May 29, 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

- The AEC Administration is aware that there are some states within our territory where stay-at-home orders and gathering restrictions have been lifted for faith-based communities. Within our territory, 75% of our churches are located in states that recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases. Because safety is our number one priority, AEC has adopted the philosophy of “no lives lost” due to the premature reopening of our church buildings. Our reopening process will be cautious, gradual, and strategic. Therefore, at this time, all Allegheny East Conference church buildings will remain closed **until further notice**. This includes special services such as funerals and weddings.
- We have secured a team of medical experts with whom we will consult in determining the safest way to reopen our buildings. Additionally, we will continue to monitor and evaluate information and guidelines from the CDC, WHO, local states, and other reputable agencies.
- 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:
 - Live streaming, video conferencing, free conference calls, etc.
 - Churches that wish to engage in small groups ministries should only do so virtually.
 - 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.
- **Church Gatherings Outside of the Church Facility.** Churches must refrain from holding church-sponsored events at other facilities or outside spaces, such as parks, beaches, and public spaces, etc.
- **Drive-in Worship Services:** If a pastor has an interest in conducting drive-thru services, AEC Administration is now open to accepting formal requests. Interested pastors should submit their request to the Ministerial Department, along with the completed “Drive-in Church Service Readiness Checklist” document. Each request will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- **Churches Live Streaming/Recording in Church Building.** Guidelines have been formulated to ensure safety. They can be found on the visitaec.org/covid19

Church Maintenance

Pastors are asked to ensure that a designee visits the church building at least once a week and conducts routine maintenance checks. Buildings left vacant and unmonitored may not be covered for vandalism and water damage under our insurance policy.

Youth Ministries

- A code of conduct for virtual meeting guidelines has been developed by the Vice President for Administration’s office, Youth Department, and Risk Management. See attached. View guidelines [here](#).

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.

AEC has officially launched its mask initiative, "Operation Mask 2020". Our goal is to distribute 2020 masks in our territory by May 31st. Visit our website for more details on how you can get involved and log your efforts at visitaec.org/mask

Reported Progress (submitted online)

Baltimore: (0/305)

Bay: (0/225)

Delaware Valley: (0/355)

Northern New Jersey (0/405)

Virginia (184/225)

Washington Metro (0/505)

GRANTS FOR FOOD PANTRIES

The AEC Community Service Department has received a grant to support several of our church's food pantries. The treasury department is processing payments for dissemination.

DONATION FOR FOOD PANTRIES

All donations to food pantries should be processed through the local church.

GENERAL DISASTER RELIEF VOLUNTEER DATABASE

If you would like to become a part of the disaster relief database, please complete the volunteer form found on the website at visitaec.org/acs.

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; 36 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 AEC's Risk Manager, Chauna-Kaye Pottinger (ckpottinger@aecsda.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 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.

Education

- Until further notice, all of our AEC school buildings are closed, and students are engaged in distance learning led by their teachers.
- AEC's Office of Education (AECOE), in consultation with administration, will determine when schools will reopen for the 2020/2021 school year.
- **Virtual promotional/graduations programs are being planned for Kindergarten and 8th grade. They are scheduled for Sunday, May 31st. More details to follow.**

****Call to Action** Distance Learning Technology Needs**

The Office of Education is raising funds and accepting donations of technology to support students engaged in distance learning, as well as prepare for long-term distance learning equipment needed for teachers and future students. The goal is to raise \$75,000. Over \$7,000 has been collected so far. Thank you to all of our donors.

If you are willing to donate a computer or Chromebook, please contact the Office of Education, John Alberty at jalberty@aecsda.com, or Jodi-Ann Kelly at jkelly@aecsda.com. If you would like

to donate funds, please do so on our website at visitaec.org/give. Indicate the amount on the “Christian Education” line of the electronic envelope.

Listed below are the immediate needs per school:

- Calvary (Newport News, VA): 2
- Dupont Park (Washington, DC): 5
- Ephesus Junior Academy (Richmond, VA): 3
- George E. Peters (Hyattsville, MD): 3
- Pine Forge Academy (various locations): 7
- Sharon (Wilmington, DE): 6

Pine Forge Academy

- A plan has been developed for students to retrieve their belongings left on campus after their abrupt departure mid-March. The school has prepared guidelines for parents to ensure a safe and smooth process. Retrieval will begin on May 11th.
- 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.
- Graduation plans are still being discussed. Graduation will not take place on its originally scheduled date, and possible dates for postponement are being considered. More details will follow.

Conference Office

- From now until further notice, AEC office staff will continue telecommuting.
- A rolling schedule will be used for office staff who need to visit the office.
- Employees are primarily communicating through phone and email.

Conference Events

- All conference-sponsored activities and events have been suspended through the month of May.
- All summer camps have been cancelled for 2020.

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.

Pastors are asked to check their “aecsda.com” email account daily for administrative updates.

A “Pastor’s Guide to Emergency Response Planning During a Pandemic” has been drafted by our Risk Management office and was disseminated to pastors on Friday, April 3rd.

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