

Missional Responses to COVID-19

Zoom Call Summary for March 23, 2020

Below is a summary of the first of a series of brief panel conversations with those leading the way in missional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the work of connecting, encouraging, and leveraging around the conference to amplify the goodness we are able to accomplish in the name of the Triune God.

Support Frontline NTCUMC Partners

It was clear that it is important that we need to offer financial support and safe volunteer support to our agencies on the frontline of helping the most vulnerable among us. Some churches are finding ways to devote any designated funds toward these agencies who will be inundated by those needing food, financial, childcare and other assistance. These agencies include:

- [CitySquare](#)
- [Crossroads Community Services](#)
- [Dallas Bethlehem Center](#)
- [Wesley-Rankin Community Center](#)
- Other Local/Ecumenical Community Partners

Safe Volunteer Recruitment

Churches are finding ways for people of all ages and levels of vulnerability to volunteer, while also minimizing the potential of catching or spreading the coronavirus.

- Examples of volunteer roles
 - Children: assemble helpful gift bags for nursing homes/assisted living centers and have them quarantine the bags for a week (or more) before handing out
 - Young Adults (from Union):
 - Prepare meals for delivery to home-bound clients
 - Livestream hosting events (requires skills with social media as well as engaging participants)
 - Delivering meal boxes to people who can use a little relief
 - Podcasting (technical skills and/or equipment)
 - Host something online for people (games, Watch party, discussion group, prayer group)
 - Donate blood
 - I have excess food from a restaurant or business to donate
 - Volunteer at various homeless ministries or food distributions

- Vulnerable Adults (age 60+, compromised immune systems): Intercessory Prayer, make masks for hospital workers, cook for others (safely have delivered by others), call and check-in with others, help-set up virtual gatherings for others to combat loneliness, etc.
- Misc: host Peace Corps Volunteers returning with nowhere to quarantine themselves
- Examples of Volunteer Sign-Ups and Responses. These churches have developed creative ways to identify volunteers and match their interests and skills with community needs.
 - [Union](#)
 - [Highland Park UMC](#)
 - [St. Andrew UMC \(Plano\)](#)

One+One School Partnerships

- COVID-19 is affecting students at highest risk of falling behind or with insecure home lives the most
- Connecting with schools and teachers to assess how we can help is essential at this time
- Volunteers needed to help distribute food, especially in Dallas Independent School District
- Tutors needed in some areas to assist with now home-schooled students

Domestic Violence

- Some shelters and hotlines are reporting increases in domestic violence and abuse
- There may be need for increasing spaces available to shelters, possibly through partnerships with churches (empty hotel space, empty church rooms, etc.)
- If interested in a Domestic Violence working group, contact Rev. Andrew Fiser (501-690-5421, fiser@ntcumc.org)

Food & Hunger

It is clear that food access and hunger are present and will be ongoing issues, due to schools being out of session, hoarding-caused shortages, and vulnerable populations needing help.

- School Districts are recruiting less-vulnerable volunteers to help distribute school lunches.
- Highland Park UMC is deploying the catering service that leases their kitchen to keep workers employed and provide meals for the hungry at partner agencies. They have greater capacity. (Contact Caroline Hazlett to learn more – hazlettc@hpumc.org)
- Union’s Food Truck can be prepared for service, but there is need for financial and personnel help to fully deploy it to serve at area(s) of need. Contact Rev. Mike Baughman to learn more (mike@uniondallas.org).
- North Texas Food Bank and Crossroads Community Services will continue to need financial support, volunteers and other donations.
- Support Local Farmers and Makers: GROW North Texas is run by a United Methodist and provides ways for small local farmers to sell produce, meats, coffee, and other products through [Market Provisions](#) online and at Dallas Farmers Market. Profits go to provide SNAP Produce Markets.

Advocacy – Texas Impact

- Advocacy by North Texas Conference churches and leaders is needed, especially around issues of protecting the most economically vulnerable from eviction, utility turn-off and making sure Federal Stimulus bills go to help individuals and families who are struggling. Keeping track of these legislative processes and actions can be difficult, so we suggest two email lists and social media alerts:
 - Texas Impact E-Updates: <https://texasimpact.org/sign-up-for-our-e-news/>
 - Church & Society (General Board of Church and Society – UNITED Methodist Church): <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/advocacy>

Blood Drives w/Social Distancing

- Blood banks have reported critically low blood donations, due to social distancing needs.
- Highland Park UMC has partnered with the Red Cross to conduct blood donations at the church's facility by appointment to avoid dangers around breaking social distance and spreading the virus. This is a model which can be replicated around the Conference.
- Grace Avenue UMC is working with Carter Blood Center to setup a blood drive that uses COVID-19 safe practices. Carter is looking for other church partners.

Assemble Easily Accessible Online Sources

- Example from White Rock UMC: <http://www.wrumc.org/covid19-resources>
- Curate trusted news for seniors since so much disinformation is spreading, and the situation is overwhelming
- Post trusted links, articles, podcasts, and other content to help those who are in your congregation but also to which your congregation can point neighbors to find help and direction.

52 Weeks of Neighboring/The Neighboring Movement

- Several local UMC's are engaged in [The Good Neighbor Experiment Cohort](#) with The Neighboring Movement, from Wichita, Kansas.
- They recommend this group's weekly free email "[52 Weeks of Neighboring](#)" that include tips for everyday folks to connect with their neighbors all around them during this pandemic.
- Subscribe to their new podcast [The Neighbor Next Door](#).

Neighbor Support Signage - UPUMC created 5 variations of lawn signs with encouraging messages that our neighbors and members can put in their yards. We're getting a lot more interest now that people are out walking more. upumc.org/yardsigns

Ministry in Social Distanced Environment

- *Safe Meal Delivery*: Good info about contact-free delivery at mealtrain.com
- New Orleans Priest's Example: Catholic priest near NOLA who has been sitting out on the concrete pad in front of his rectory (near the sidewalk), drawing a big square around himself (to keep folks 6 ft away), sitting another chair outside the square, and then setting up a sign that says, "Need to talk? Have questions? Want to give confession?"

Homelessness

- Austin Street Shelter, The Bridge, and CitySquare are all adjusting services to aid social distancing and help with handwashing, so space is tight. The City of Dallas has created an emergency shelter to create more safe space. Financial support and volunteers who aren't as vulnerable to COVID-19 are highly needed.

Funerals & Grief Work

- Funeral gatherings are being limited to 10 persons at a funeral home currently in Dallas County. This makes grieving and mourning difficult for friends and family. Tighter restrictions and spikes in deaths may further complicate funeral practices.
- Examples of ways to help people grieve:
 - Collecting selfies of congregants to tape to chairs for service with restricted attendance.
- Further research is needed for helping pastors and churches know how to manage funeral needs and help people do the grief work needed during this time.

Hospital Visits & Support

- Hospitals and Care Facilities are either forbidding all visitors, including pastors, allowing one visitor at a time, or allowing pastors to visit at end of life situations. The grieving process for those whose family members may die w/o loved ones present while under quarantine is compounded.

Supporting Medical Personnel and First Responders

- Due to hoarding and the increased need for protective equipment, frontline medical staff are having to [ration facemasks](#). Coronavirus is highly contagious, but N95 rated facemasks can protect staff from being infected by those for whom they are caring in ER's and hospitals across the country. It is hoped that Federal efforts will increase the supply of these life-saving items, but as cases increase there will be a need for alternatives according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Fabric face masks are currently being accepted by [some](#) hospitals for patients who are worried, but also as back-ups for doctors, nurses, and other staff. See article from an Oklahoma hospital ([here](#))

Connections at Baylor Scott & White as well as Methodist Health System Hospitals have alerted us they will gladly accept any help they can get from us. Rev. Andrew Fiser has connections with and can help coordinate deliveries to those systems. You are also encouraged to form connections with your local hospital.

Here are opportunities to protect those who are protecting us and our most vulnerable loved ones:

Collect & Donate N95 Masks to Hospitals

- Raise awareness with others at church, UMW circle, family, community
- Collect masks and safely donate to local hospital (Call ahead)
- Offer "amnesty" to those who initially hoarded masks
- Or arrange to deliver them with help of Rev. Andrew Fiser to Methodist Health System or Baylor Scott & White
- Note: Some are using 3D printers to make masks

Make Fabric Masks for Hospitals

- Raise awareness with others at church, UMW circle, family, community
- Sew individually
- Create circle for making masks (with social distancing in place)
- Enlist friends who are sewing enthusiasts or who have supplies
- Help others collect materials for masks
- Collect Elastic String or Alternative: Elastic of all sorts is in short supply
- Connect with local hospital to deliver or contact Rev. Andrew Fiser to deliver to Methodist Health System or Baylor Scott & White (some are not requesting them at this time)

[VIDEO Instructions](#) from The Turban Project

[Instructables Pattern](#) and Instructions

[Filter Material](#) that is Difficult to Obtain

***Instructions on a more effective mask with nose fit are forthcoming**

Also, see Atlantic Article, [“Where are the Masks?”](#) by Wajahat Ali, 20 March, 2020.

For more information please contact Rev. Andrew Fiser at fiser@ntcumc.org or 501-690-5421.

Recovery Communities

- Recovery communities such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meet in many of our churches. Gatherings may be restricted by municipalities, or by individual church decisions about safe use of meeting space for the safety of those gathering. Some churches are helping groups use technology to meet online using Zoom or other platforms. Others have covered or non-covered outdoor space that would allow for social distancing. Some churches have chosen to continue to allow meetings at their facilities due to the essential need for these groups for some individuals.
- Helpful Links:
 - AADallas.org - great fellowship for those who struggle with alcohol.
 - NA.org- great fellowship for those who struggle with drugs and/or alcohol
 - familiesanonymous.org - Great fellowship for the families who have a loved one struggling with addiction to drugs, alcohol and related behavioral issues
 - al-anon.org- Great fellowship for the families and loved ones struggling with the disease of addiction
 - sccenter.org- Suicide and Crisis Center of North Texas - 214-828-1000 - 24 hour hotline

Internet and Technology Access

- Local students, returned college student, and others may not have access to the internet for critical homework or other important needs. Some churches are letting individuals use the church’s internet while parked outside. And some are devoting unused technology to assist those who need to apply for help, etc.
- PCsforpeople.com offers affordable options

Weekly Calls – Mondays at 10AM

- We will host weekly calls and send out weekly CMO Newsletters with helpful links and articles, as well as a recording of and notes from the call,
- Please sign-up at <https://ntcumc.org/missional-outreach>