

## **Advice on cancelling services and programs by Robert L. Duston and shared by Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, Arlington District Superintendent**

*Should my Church/Synagogue/Mosque cancel services?*

*Should our non-profit cancel its big fundraiser?*

*Our company's business is doing in-person and on-line training and seminars. Should we cancel all of the in-person events?*

*Should our school start canceling sports/theatre/other public events*

*And if we do so, when can we start again?*

### **Answers**

- First, follow the direction or guidance of local health officials. If they recommend or direct closures or limits as part of containment efforts at community spread, including when to start closing and when they can re-start, follow them.
  - What local health officials direct today, such as voluntary self-quarantine after learning that someone at a church service, school, etc. tests positive, could change as the virus spreads and there are far more documented cases, with relatively mild symptoms for most.
  - However, depending on how the virus spreads and other factors, local health officials may try closures to limit community transmission. The number of local communities trying this is increasing, and may expand with the WHO declaration of a pandemic.
- If you voluntarily stop now, you need to decide what the trigger is to start again. This virus could burn out in a few months, or continue to expand and linger for a long time, like the flu. It's going to evolve quickly. As the next few weeks and months pass and testing increases, you are likely to have members/employees/customers who test positive. The recommended protocols are likely to evolve.
- For most people under age 60 the effects will be mild—no symptoms or mild cold/flu like symptoms for a few days. They can participate in your events and the general community with relatively low risk to themselves. If you continue with events, focus on those more vulnerable populations—those over 60, or with pre-existing symptoms and those living with individuals who are more vulnerable. Consider options for them to participate with lower risk (such as on-line church services); social distancing at fundraising events; local activities with smaller crowds; outdoor events, etc.
- Base your risk assessment on the facts, public health advice and the practical realities of your business. Cancelling or postponing even a large event schedules in the next few months is different than suspending weekly religious services, or a key part of your business operations.

The announcements in DC's today, the National Cathedral, and lots of other places, is going to increase the pressure on pastors for short term voluntary isolation to reduce or delay community spread. There have been multiple articles in the Post today and yesterday saying any delays will help in the long term. So one option would be to announce that the church would do its part to assist for 2-3 weeks: live stream only, no groups larger than 50 (or some number) then would resume on 3/29 or Palm Sunday unless public health officials say otherwise.

One expert I heard this afternoon said that the key factor in group events is whether the members of the community trust each other than no one is going to come if they are sick, have traveled to hot spots, or there are other reasons for self-quarantine. If a church thinks its members are sophisticated enough to follow-that, then continue. Which does raise a tough questions about Palm Sunday and Easter.”