

Guidelines for Clergy Pastoral Care in a Time of Pandemic

- Any pastoral visit to someone who is ill means that the visitor becomes a potential vector of transmission. This could be the case for each and every pastoral visit at this point in time. Our instinct and deep desire is to be with those who are sick, suffering, or dying. The challenge for us all is that by doing so we will pose a further danger to every other part of our community, not just to ourselves.
- At present, there is a severe shortage of the protective gear necessary to tend the sick (gloves, masks, gowns, etc.), and what gear there is needs to be reserved for medical personnel on the frontlines. This is, therefore, a time to think outside the box about how to provide in-person pastoral care. If a phone or video call is not sufficient, it is possible to be outside someone's window, within sight, but talking to them by phone from a distance.
- Area hospitals have begun to limit the number of visitors any patient may receive, in some cases to one person for the duration of the patient's stay. Given these severe limitations on pastoral visits to hospitals, please begin to explore digital and technological alternatives (see diocesan website for resources.)
- Ministering to the dying and burying the dead is going to be a particularly difficult pastoral challenge (difficult in the sense that we may be kept from doing what we know and long to do for people.) We may not be able to bury our dead until after this crisis has passed. We all need to know this now so that we can prepare ourselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Older individuals are at higher risk of contracting -- and transmitting -- Covid 19.
- The mortality rate for people 60 years and older could be as high as 6%, and for people 80 years and older as high as 15%. We therefore need to think through ministering with the dying and burying the dead.
- Please note: It is possible to have Covid 19 and not have a fever. Not having a fever is not enough to be certain you or someone else is not actively contagious.
- Every delay in action is a mathematical increase in consequences. Please act now, and know that taking these precautions is, in fact, serving the sick and our neighbor.
- This guidance is based on what we know now. We will issue further guidance as we learn more.

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The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina asked them to share their assessment of COVID-19 specifically for churches. Both documents, including one more specifically about pastoral care from one of their colleagues, are attached to this message.