



COVID-19 GUIDANCE

Pastoral care, mental health and resilience

Churches and church communities play a unique role in building relationships and connections between people across age groups, professions and neighbourhoods. In addition, church leaders are often well connected with other organisations that serve local communities. As a result, these leaders and organisations are uniquely positioned to help reinforce connections between people who may be isolated during periods of physical distancing. Maintaining and strengthening relationships during Covid-19 can fortify the mental and spiritual health of your church members and contribute to resilience in the wider community. Practices such as prayer, inspirational reading and community service can build confidence and create a sense of calm. Below are steps that can help.¹

Keeping the community connected

Churches and church leaders can strengthen their communities and combat isolation by checking in on individual members regularly, preferably by phone. This is particularly important to keep an eye on individuals who may be living alone, who are elderly, who have disabilities or who are otherwise vulnerable. They can ensure that community contact lists are up to date and accessible to their members. Organisations can create 'calling trees' in which individual members volunteer to phone several other members regularly to check on their well-being. In-person visits should be avoided where possible; where they are necessary, visitors should observe appropriate physical distancing guidelines and other preventive measures.

Helping others

Helping others who need support can benefit the person giving the assistance as well as the person receiving it. Faith communities can identify ways that their members can help others, depending upon individual risk levels (checking on the elderly, people with disabilities, and vulnerable neighbours by phone and offering to deliver groceries etc). Church leaders and communities can encourage the sharing of resources to provide for those whose livelihoods are disrupted and who cannot provide for themselves and their families. Of particular importance is caring for health workers, law-enforcement officers and those delivering essential services who continue to work, sometimes away from their families. Church leaders can encourage those who have the means to

¹ This material has been adapted from the World Health Organization's guidance for [Faith-based organisations and faith leaders](#).

give financial support to those whose livelihoods have been affected by the pandemic. As community members work together, they can create a sense of solidarity and build resilience.

Helping members manage worrying news

Church leaders can encourage their communities to take steps to manage their stress and to keep up hope during times of isolation, fear and uncertainty.² The constant torrent of news reports about Covid-19 can make anyone feel worried. Church leaders can encourage community members to seek information on the virus at a few, regular points in the day, directing members to credible sources of information, and to maintain hope by reading the Bible.

See [Tearfund's Covid-19 biblical resources](#), including :

- Prayer and spiritual practices during Covid-19
- 'Lament' Bible study
- 'Being church during Covid-19' Bible study
- 'Loving our neighbours during Covid-19' Bible study
- 'Dealing with fear and anxiety' Bible study
- 'Taking courage' Bible study
- 'Dealing with death' Bible study

Responding to situations of domestic violence

In settings where movement restrictions are in place, there is the potential for an increase in domestic violence, particularly against women, children and other marginalised people. Existing vulnerabilities associated with age, religion, migration status, sexuality and ethnicity may be exacerbated. Church leaders can actively speak out against violence and can provide support or encourage victims to seek help. Where a child is concerned, religious leaders should be familiar with child protection and safeguarding policies, including what to report, to whom and how.

Offer special prayers for the sick alongside messages of hope and comfort

Church leaders can provide church communities with appropriate prayers, biblical reflections and messages of hope. Highlighting the opportunities presented for reflection, prayer and time with family members or others can also prove helpful.

²See ['Dealing with fear and anxiety'](#) Bible study