

Summary of ZOOM Meetings with Pastors and Congregational Contact Persons  
March 17, 2020; 4:00-5:00 and 7:30-8:30 pm

Opening Words: Firstly, **thank you for your ministry**, for your leadership, for your non-anxious presence (at least in public), and for your humanity. You are people of faith and people of faith. Both our humanity and our faith are being tested. And it is our common humanity and our common faith that will guide us through this crisis. God has gifted you with what is needed to walk with your congregations and communities during this season. And God has gifted us with one another from whom we can learn and upon whom we can lean.

**Words from St. Patrick's Breastplate Prayer**

I bind to myself today  
The power of Heaven,  
The light of the sun,  
The brightness of the moon,  
The splendour of fire,  
The flashing of lightning,  
The swiftness of wind,  
The depth of sea,  
The stability of earth,  
The compactness of rocks.  
Christ, protect me today  
Against every poison, against burning,  
Against drowning, against death-wound,  
That I may receive abundant reward.  
Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ within me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ at my right, Christ at my left...  
Amen.

**Observations and Words of Counsel:**

1. **Practice self-care!** Use those spiritual disciplines that center and ground you! Model healthy spirituality and healthcare to others. Invite others to assist.
2. I find myself tempted to check news sources frequently to see what's new. Probably 2 or 3 times a day is plenty! **Stay reliably informed** but don't go too deep in the weeds of politics and policy.
3. **Listen and heed the counsel of the government.** This should guide your decisions on cancelling events. For me personally, I've found state

government to be my primary source of information and tend to lean toward implementing the more restrictive counsel. Follow CDC guidelines. The threat of a “peak” or “spike” in COVID-19 cases does get my attention. **I believe we must implement the more restrictive measures in order to “flatten the curve.”**

4. **Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.** With your family, with your congregational leaders, with your vulnerable ones. Clarify who is the communicator in your congregation. Where do people go for information about your church and activities?
5. **Stay connected to community leaders** and other religious leaders in your community. As Glen Guyton says, “Bring the Peace” to your community. **Strange partnerships will likely save us!**
6. **Laugh!** Use your close connection to the CDC to your benefit!
7. **Sleep!**

**Biggest Questions and Concerns:** Your responses seemed to focus on the following areas:

1. Lots of concern about **maintaining community** with the most vulnerable and most isolated folks in your congregations. I think this is a “triage” situation. Who are the most isolated and threatened in your congregation and community? With whom can you make a difference? Who has multiple layers of safety-net or circles of care and who doesn’t? What are ways you have found to stay connected?

Responses:

- Paoli Mennonite has “circles of care” that all members are part of. Once a week the leader of each circle reports to the pastor (or lay leader during their transition.)
- Hively Mennonite: The congregation has been divided into 3-4 groups and deacons are assigned a group to check in with, focusing on the most vulnerable in their groups. They also have volunteers writing and sending cards and notes to people.
- Madison Mennonite: Offering one hour daily ZOOM check-ins for anyone who wants to join.
- Chicago Community Mennonite: Developed a “buddy system” and geographical groups with between 5-15 households in each group with a point person for each group. Also checked with parents with children to see if there is interest in an online “catechism class.”
- Raleigh Mennonite: Leadership team divided up the directory and did a household check in with brief survey; physical needs, interest in online Bible study, ZOOM pastoral care?

- FMC Wadsworth: developed a spreadsheet with everyone’s names and record of who has been contacted and when.
  - Assembly Mennonite: Created two Google Doc forms that people can respond to; Prayer requests and interest in participating in a buddy system (Who wants a buddy and who is willing to be a buddy.)
  - Faith Mennonite: Provided a caroling style hymn sing outside the window of a person isolated in a nursing home.
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2. **How do you know what people need? Ask. Listen. Watch.**
    - Those who are not technologically as savvy may receive help from a volunteer to get them set up with ZOOM or other technology.
    - Don’t forget to reach out to health care providers in your congregations who are under significant stress.
    - Some expressed concern that they might plan multiple “great” activities and then no one will participate. Don’t be afraid to test your ideas with others before implementing.
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  3. Have someone **update your contact information** for members and regular attenders.
  4. Local **hospitals, nursing homes and prisons** have visitation policies in place. Most make exceptions for end of life and unique situations. What has been your experience?
    - Check in with local providers before showing up.
    - Doug heard of one clergy person being denied visitation with a person on hospice but doubtful this is common.
    - Think through how you will provide funerals during this season. Small family graveside service with a memorial service at a later time?
    - Don’t forget the prison population and the increased isolation they are experiencing.
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  5. **Move from a “volunteer” to “voluntold” mentality when needed.** You know your congregation the best and who might be able to respond to a need. Don’t hold back in asking for volunteers. Most people want to help during a crisis.
    - Encourage people to ask themselves what they have to offer.
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  6. **Financial concerns.** Invite generosity from those who have resources to share. Release those with limited resources from financial giving to the church.

Focus on basic needs: food, clothing, medical supplies, shelter. Other thoughts?

- Check with local utility companies to see what “grace” they are offering on paying bills during this season.
- Stay informed about what the Federal Government is offering.
- Faith Mennonite: A teenager is providing childcare for a single parent. Another member of the congregation is paying the teen for the childcare services.
- Find out what resources are in the community and how these resources are being distributed; food banks, medical clinics, COVID-19 testing, etc.
- Local transitional housing services may need food services and may be accepting food donations.

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7. **Decision making in the congregation:** Crises require more directive leadership. Exercise your pastoral authority. Sometimes you might have to ask for forgiveness later...and people will likely be gracious.

- Error on the cautious side when considering in-person meetings.
- Follow governmental guidance regarding gatherings.
- As of March 16, several CDC congregations are planning at least eight weeks of alternative worship and programming.
- Meet via ZOOM and conference call as much as possible.

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8. **How long?** It’s really hard to plan when things change daily. It would be awesome to be back together for Easter Sunday...but don’t plan on it at this point. This may be an extended Holy Saturday season. What gifts do we find in Holy Saturday? I’d suggest making alternative worship plans 3-4 weeks in advance and reassess as you go along. How are you thinking about this?

- Is this what the Psalmists meant when they cried, “How long, O Lord?”
- Grace used Facebook Live on March 15.
- Shalom Community used WebX on March 15.
- Chicago Community and others used ZOOM for worship.
- Invite musicians to prepare special music for worship that can be either recorded or done live from their location.

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9. What about **Easter**?

- Raleigh Mennonite is thinking of moving Easter back to the first Sunday when the congregation meets again in person.

- Some are planning a mini-Easter online and a big Easter when they return. **Easter is a season...**
- Madison Mennonite is looking out toward Pentecost and building worships toward the (re)birth of the church.
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## 10. Technology

Alison Calessa Brookins developed a ZOOM cheat sheet. It is available at <https://mcusacdc.org/covid-19-coronavirus-resources/>

Onelicense is granting gratis access during the crisis

<https://news.onelicense.net/2020/03/13/one-license-offers-gratis-licenses-to-help-cope-with-covid-19-challenges-valid-through-april-15/?fbclid=IwAR2d8pydwp7-hjkbPr0wSMQMUwHbQvONIfv9OMZE5g2Q2rwwq87-QTbZc>

What do you do for those who don't have zoom available to them?

We sent out a youtube link to the service afterward.

People can call in to listen only via phone.