

#ELCACChurchTogether



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

FAQ - Visitation and Care Strategies for Congregations

March 27, 2020 – Context Pandemic

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to continue becoming your church in new ways, not yet knowing what that might look like, but trusting that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. -ELW Evening Prayer (with edits)

Our congregational leaders recognize the growing need to provide support and care for your members in this time, and are aware that the needs exceed the span of care they are able to provide right now.

One way you can increase the ministry of your congregation and support your pastor is to create ways of multiplying your care/support ministry. This will be a challenging time for God's Church, but the ways we deepen relationships and community will be meaningful and will have a deep impact on the lives of those who are particularly lonely and isolated. Everything you do will be 100% better than what will happen if you don't try.

It all depends on the size of your congregation and your assets. Here are some options that could be used for the short term or even longer term.

Prayer Chains

With some training, the prayer chains of our congregations can be invited to support the caring ministry of your congregations.

- Each one calls one friend, checks in each week, and lets a leader know which households they are in touch with.

Pastoral Care Phone Team

Form a team of people who have the gifts of listening, care, or even the open spirit to grow.

- Meet in a Zoom call or conference call - in a group or individually.
- Suggested Train Care Team outline
 - Prayer
 - 10-15 minutes to begin. This will be more a learning –action – reflection approach. People will learn as they go.
 - Divide up names to call
 - Make calls

- Check out – pray with special concerns learned in the calls
- Share with the pastor/minister in confidence later by email or by calls.
- You could work at the same time during the day or evening, or over a block of time.
- Weekly check in gathering for prayer, another skill, divide up calls and with check out calls at the end will allow supervision by the pastor or minister.

Train people in basic skills of pastoral care.

- Confidentiality
- Listening well
- Open questions
- Building prayers while listening
- Not making judgements
- Helpful questions in the pandemic
- Prayer naming themes in the call and particular people name – notes for prayer at end
- Taking notes to pass on to pastor

Pastors will create lists of names for each person, receive input about possible calls and review notes or debrief with each caller.

Focus on strategic calls

- Shut Ins
- Elderly members
- People with vulnerable household members or who are vulnerable
- People you know have lost their jobs
- Business and community leaders - They are making big decisions and there is plenty of pressure (I might leave some of these for the pastor as the public leader.)
- Young Households – How are they
- Young Adults – How are they
- Youth – disruption of school

Divide Up Congregation Geographically

- Divide the congregation up by different sectors or communities. Pastors provide oversight for who is called. Using a directory call people in your area to check in.

Divide Up the Congregation Relationally or Alphabetically

- Get a directory or a list of members. Pastors will provide oversight for who is called.
- Divide the list up and note who you call with a highlighter, your initials and date – This might be done in a Google Doc.

Zoom Calls

- If someone is comfortable in this environment they could invite six other households to join them in a weekly check in on Zoom – It is Community Check in for 30 minutes – Pray in and to close. Have people share a high and low and where they've seen God's compassion, mercy, and care this week.

- Shepherding Groups
- Trusted leader –
 - 3-5 Households – Leader
 - Call once or twice a week

Principle - Don't talk it up.... just do it. Under promise and over-deliver.

Simple Call Script

Introduce yourself – why calling.

Hi I am John Johnson from _____.

Is this a good time? We are doing some quick calls to check in with our households in our congregation.

How are you? Your household/family? Your parents? Your children?

- Take some notes and explain you will pass them on to the pastor for prayers and sometimes follow up.
 - Is someone taking care of your needs?
 - Do you have the internet?
 - Are you able to access the news from church?
 - But mostly, how are you doing?
- We know that all our families are being impacted by this. If they are working, gently ask how things are going for them or their family.
- Is there anyone the pastor should call (For instance a person shares that they are facing surgery, or even if someone would rather speak to the pastor accept that and pass the name on.)

Here is what is happening at church

- Worship approach
- Daily Devotions Strategy
- Bible Study – if Happening
- How long –not sure
- Holy Week –

(Be careful not to get into sales here. A gentle offer: You might be wondering what's happening in our church, so I want you to know that worship and Bible study (or whatever) have now moved online at.....We're taking this a few days at time and following health guidelines. Please be sure to look for updates at or on.....)

Closing Prayer There are general prayers at the end of the document or you could teach people to build a prayer as the visit happens.

Build a prayer. – Take notes as you talk. Ask if there is anything in particular they would like to have included in the prayer.

- Dear God, we know through Jesus that you long to bring healing and wholeness to our lives and world
- Gratitude – We give thanks for....(things going well)
- Lament (Bringing to God our sadness) – Dear God we ask that you would (things not going well).
- Please protect and guide _____

- We ask in the name of Jesus
- Amen.

Other Prayer Options from - Prayers for Times of Public Health Concern: COVID-19/Coronavirus

God, our peace and our strength, we pray for our nation and the world as we face new uncertainties around COVID-19. Protect the most vulnerable among us, especially all who are currently sick or in isolation. Grant wisdom, patience, and clarity to health care workers, especially as their work caring for others puts them at great risk. Guide us as we consider how best to prepare and respond in our families, congregations, workplaces, and communities. Give us courage to face these days not with fear but with compassion, concern, and acts of service, trusting that you abide with us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As you pray together, other relevant needs to be named might include:

- Hospitals, nursing homes, other health care facilities
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- The World Health Organization
- Medical researchers and scientists
- Schools: Calm to children who are fearful from all they hear and see around them Patience in times of school closures
- Guidance for school administrators as they make decisions
- Workplaces: Workers who are anxious about the safety of their workplaces
- Uncertainty in how work will be accomplished in the days ahead
- Calm and guidance amid financial uncertainties
- Government institutions and municipal agencies:
- Guidance when making decisions for our communities
- Houses of worship and their ministries at this time
- For all who travel
- For all who grieve the loss of loved ones
- For other needs particular to your community

ELCA Prayers for Covid19

Time of conflict, crisis, disaster O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 76)

Those neglected Almighty and most merciful God, we call to mind before you all whom it is easy to forget: those who are homeless, destitute, sick, isolated, and all who have no one to care for them. May we bring help and healing to those who are broken in body or spirit, that they may have comfort in sorrow, company in loneliness, and a place of safety and warmth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 79)

Those in affliction Lord Christ, you came into the world as one of us, and suffered as we do. As we go through the trials of life, help us to realize that you are with us at all times and in all things; that we have no secrets from you; and that your loving grace enfolds us for eternity. In the security of your embrace we pray. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 84)

The chronically ill and those who support them Loving God, your heart overflows with compassion for your whole creation. Pour out your Spirit on all people living with illness for which there is no cure, as well as their families and loved ones. Help them to know that you claim them as your own and deliver them from fear and pain; for the sake of Jesus Christ, our healer and Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 85)

Caregivers and others who support the sick God, our refuge and strength, our present help in time of trouble, care for those who tend the needs of [the sick]/[name/s]. Strengthen them in body and spirit. Refresh them when weary; console them when anxious; comfort them in grief; and hearten them in discouragement. Be with us all, and give us peace at all times and in every way; through Christ our peace. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 85)

Health care providers Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 85)