



THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA & THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

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Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian

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September 30, 2020

ADVISORY #25 TO: UCJCI MINISTERS, LAY PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONAL BOARDS RE: COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

My sisters and brothers,

Greetings,

The UCJCI COVID-19 Response Team now meets every two weeks. Consequently, these updates will follow the scheduled meetings.

Following are the reminders and decisions taken by the Team, which met yesterday, September 29, 2020, under the various headings. **New/updated information is in bold print.**

1. Compliance with National Orders/Protocols

We celebrate the fact that Cayman is now COVID-19 free. Consequently, the wearing of masks in public is no longer mandatory, although social distancing rules remain in place. Schools have resumed, with no remote learning. There will be a phased reopening of the borders in October.

In Jamaica, we are experiencing community spread across the island, with a daily increase in the number of persons who have contracted the disease, increasing deaths, combined with a fall in the recovery rate, which currently stands at 28.8%.

We continue to encourage compliance with the directives and recommendations of the legitimate state authorities in both nations.

2. Common COVID-19 Issues

The committee reflected on some troubling issues caused by the pandemic, which are common among all four regions, as follows:

- The fellowship gap – the inability of some people to either attend worship services or have physical contact with others.
- Those being left behind (numbered among the most vulnerable group, some of whom have no access to technology or have limited connection to the church community).
- The ministry to children and youth.

Moderator: Rt. Rev. Dr. Gordon Cowans, **General Secretary:** Rev. Norbert D. Stephens,
Regional Deputy General Secretaries: Mrs. Maureen Henry, Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble Bloomfield, Rev. Dr. Henry Samuels, Mrs. Rose Wedderburn

Registered Charity Organization

Registration Number: CA100-57C

- A sense of weariness among categories of workers (first responders [health, security, transportation, cleaners], educators, etc.).
- Concern regarding the education of our children in Jamaica (a lack of internet access and/or devices and uncertainly about the learning model).
- Those facing economic challenges.
- Those experiencing psychological issues.
- Spiritual dryness among persons at all levels.

Please note that, at the Synodical level, a number of actions have already taken place and will take place in order to respond to these issues.

The committee is encouraging you and your congregation(s), where possible, to continue to identify ways of engaging and/or responding to these issues.

Some ideas to complement already existing initiatives in your congregations and charges are as follows:

- For the month of October 2020, congregations may wish to have special services for first responders from their congregation or community, in which these persons are recognized, encouraged and prayed for. The same could be done for children, parents and teachers who will be returning to school in Jamaica.
- Where possible, offer tablets or other devices and back-to-school materials to needy children in your congregation(s)/community.
- As a means of encouragement, in addition to contact via cellular phones, consider writing letters to shut-in/stay-at-home members or offer/send tokens (bearing in mind sanitation protocols).
- Share your ideas on how some of these issues may be addressed, or are being addressed, in the wider church community.

3. Congregational Life

Church Worship

- Most of the United Churches in **Cayman** have resumed services in their sanctuaries.
- The church in **Jamaica** is allowed to gather for worship under a number of conditions. We have, however, received reports that in some cases, persons have not been following some of the protocols, including the wearing of masks and physical distancing. **Given the recent spike in confirmed cases, we strongly urge you to minimize in-person contact as much as possible. Please ensure that ALL of the following conditions are met for Sunday worship in your congregation(s):**
 - Distancing rule of one person per 40 sq. ft., with persons being at least 6 feet apart. All persons are required to observe the physical distancing rule, however, families can sit together.
 - **Outside of the sanctuary, all gatherings are limited to 15 persons under physical distancing rules.**
 - Have multiple services. (The same persons should not be present in multiple services.)
 - We recommend that a record of the persons attending the services, including their contact number, be kept in order to assist the health authorities in their contact tracing process, should there be a confirmed case among attendees.
 - Temperature checks prior to entering the sanctuary. We strongly recommend the use of infrared thermometers.

- Ensure sanitization measures are in place at entrances.
 - **All persons must wear a mask. The Communications Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister has indicated the following:**
 - **Preachers do not have to wear a mask during preaching, as long as they are alone at the pulpit/lectern.**
 - **Worship Leaders/Praise Teams/Cantors do not have to wear a mask while leading praise and worship. We strongly request compliance with the social distancing rule.**
 - **Congregants must wear a mask at all times, including while singing.**
 - Choirs are not allowed.
 - Air conditioning units are not to be used in the sanctuary.
 - **The Stay-at-Home Order applies to persons aged 70 years and over.** All of our lay pastors and retired ministers within this age range should abide by this rule and remotely engage their congregation or charge. Your Regional Mission Council is willing and able to assist you, where possible, in facilitating remote services and meetings.
- The expectation of the health authorities is that the cases in Jamaica will continue to rise for the next few weeks. In order to safeguard the health of our members and adherents, our anticipation is that you will ensure that these guidelines are strictly enforced.
 - **We have attached a document with guidelines for congregations in the event that COVID-19 is present among members.**
 - We strongly suggest that gatherings outside of worship services (such as meetings, bible studies etc.), be held remotely to minimize in-person contact, and so limit the spread of the disease.
 - **Funeral services are not allowed at this time. We encourage online gatherings for the celebration of the life and witness of those who have passed on, while the restriction remains in place. Burials are permitted with a maximum of 15 persons including the pastor, family members and cemetery/grave personnel. Please note that the duration of burials should not exceed 30 minutes.**
 - We encourage you, during this period, to include in your worship services, prayers and other expressions of solidarity with members and adherents who have suffered recent bereavement, including those which are due to COVID-19.
 - Based on the social distancing rule, coupled with the warning from the state authorities of the continued spike in the number of confirmed cases, we do not endorse adult baptism at this time. However, we will be engaging our congregations in a time of reflection on the theology of baptism and conversations on the practices of baptism in light of COVID-19.
 - We encourage the continuation of streamed services and sharing on social media, as some persons will still not be able to attend worship services.
 - We remind you of the time of prayer every Wednesday between 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. We will share with you the specific suggested foci for each week.
 - We continue to distribute the weekly House Worship Liturgy, using a thematic approach with sermon/reflection notes. We welcome feedback on how this is being used within the church.
 - Tune in each Sunday to LOVE 101 FM in Jamaica at 3:30 p.m. for a broadcast of a congregational worship service or the sharing of reflections/activities by the UCJCI.

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4 Pastoral Care

- Given the psychological impact of the restriction of movement caused by the coronavirus, we celebrate those persons who continue to call members and offer inspirational messages and other support systems. Regional Counsellors have been appointed, and this ministry is available in all regions.
- **We continue to encourage congregations and regions to be especially sensitive to the needs of the elderly.** Please ensure that their basic needs are met (e.g. food, sanitization, medication) and, where possible, offer daily contact by phone or social media to those who live alone.
- We also encourage you to engage your congregants to determine their access to, and understanding of, the digital space in order to gauge our reach as a church.

5. Synod and Regional Offices

In an effort to mitigate any risk of COVID-19 infection among staff, while maximizing productivity, please note the following, which will guide our operations:

The Synod Administration Centre and each Regional Office (Jamaica) will open for 2 days per week, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Cayman Regional Office will operate its normal working hours.

6. Communication

Please continue to pay close attention to the various pieces of information sent to you via our communication channels (radio, e-mail, website [www.ucjci.com], WhatsApp Messenger, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook).

May we together continue to depend on God, *who has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and of power and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7).

Sincerely,

THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



Norbert D. Stephens (Rev.)
General Secretary