



THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA & THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

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Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian

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October 14, 2020

ADVISORY #26 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, October 14, 2020, under the various headings. **New/updated information is in bold print.**

1. Compliance with National Orders/Protocols

We celebrate the fact that Cayman continues its path to recovery from COVID-19. 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. The phased reopening of the borders since October 1, continues with strict protocols for entering the country. Significantly, Cayman has carried out 39,477 tests for COVID-19 since March 2020, and scheduled testing for persons in the various sectors of the country is ongoing.

In Jamaica, we are experiencing community spread across the island, with a daily increase in the number of persons who have contracted the disease and increasing deaths. On a positive note, the recovery rate has increased to 42.9 %, up from 28.8% two weeks ago.

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.
- 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, several actions have already taken place and will take place 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.**
- **We are strongly encouraging an initiative started by Mrs. Teckla Silvera (wife of Rev. I. Wayne Silvera), to “Share your Wifi Code” with your neighbour, especially those who have a child or children with no access or insufficient data for online learning.**
- **Where your church hall has internet access in a community where children have limited or no access to online learning, establish a ministry that offers the space and access to these children using clear guidelines and with adequate supervision.**
- 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 several 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 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 now applies to persons aged 65 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 health authorities expect 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, we anticipate that you will ensure that these guidelines are strictly enforced.
 - 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 a recent bereavement, including those which are due to COVID-19.
 - **Regarding the Sacrament of Baptism for those who are candidates for membership in congregations in Jamaica, the following should apply:**
 - **We invite you to preach/teach the Doctrine of Salvation, ensuring that our members and potential members understand that baptism is not a requirement for Salvation, but rather, is an expression of one's acceptance of the gift of Salvation.**
 - **Help candidates for membership, who were either baptized as infants or were previously baptized, to understand that re-baptism is not necessary for membership.**

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

- **For those candidates for membership who were not previously baptized, the sacrament of baptism should only be administered by pouring or sprinkling, while ensuring the physical distancing and sanitizing protocols are followed.**
- **There should be no baptism by immersion in your sanctuary.**
- 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.

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 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norbert D. Stephens', written over a horizontal line.

Norbert D. Stephens (Rev.)
General Secretary