

COVID-19

PRACTISING OUR FAITH SAFELY DURING A PANDEMIC



**ADAPTING
HOW WE GATHER
TOGETHER, PRAY
AND PRACTISE
RITUALS**



Resource Guide for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities

Cover photo credits (clockwise):

Bangkok / Thailand April 2, 2020: Thai Buddhist monks wearing face shields to protect themselves from Covid-19 collect morning alms
By Thavorn Rueang

Muslim woman reading Holy Quran praying for God to bless her in a public place
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Portrait of male surgeon praying in an operation theater at a hospital. Healthcare workers in the Coronavirus Covid19 pandemic
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A young Asian father teaches a child to read the Holy Quran
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A priest and a devotee wear masks and maintain social distance while offering prayers at a temple in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
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A woman, holding a holy text, bows her head with her hands raised in prayer
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Migrant labourers who failed to reach their native villages after lockdown offer (Namaz) prayers besides the closed shop where they used to work.
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A portrait of a man holding Holy Quran and prayer beads
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A woman raises her hands in prayer, seated in the pews of a church
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Reverend Tito Ringanza, the Provincial Secretary of Episcopal Church of South Sudan, reads a Bible at his office in Yambio, South Sudan, March 2020. Rev. Tito's mother died in the 1976 Ebola outbreak. Reverend Tito's church spends time during church services to educate people on how to take care and protect themselves from Ebola virus.
By Brian Ongoro

BACKGROUND ON THE GLOBAL MULTI-RELIGIOUS FAITH-IN-ACTION COVID-19 INITIATIVE

Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC) <https://www.faith4sbcc.org/> is a global partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the world's largest inter-faith network **Religions for Peace (RfP)**, and knowledge partner **Joint Learning Initiative on Local Faith Communities (JLI)**. FPCC was conceived in 2018 to move beyond single sector, siloed, ad-hoc and sometimes instrumentalist approaches of faith engagement in development work and was officially launched by RfP and UNICEF's Executive Director in Washington DC in October 2019.

The central aim of the partnership is **to support positive social and behaviour change with and for children, parents and communities** with specific emphasis on going beyond simply delivering messages, to engaging faith communities in self-reflection, dialogue, exchange and feedback in order to achieve lasting positive change on jointly agreed priorities affecting children and their families. After a year of evidence generation, development of 17 country case studies, reviews of existing resource guides and development of a Theory of Change, the partners agreed to work together more systematically and deeply in keeping with the new engagement model in six African "Early Adopter Countries".

In the last quarter of 2019, a process of country level "WorkRocks" was initiated to pilot the new way of coordinating planning and action of UNICEF country offices with their respective Inter-Religious Councils and the local offices of international faith-based organizations.

In February 2020, in response to the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, the FPCC partners agreed to immediately shift focus of its joint workplan to respond to the international crisis through a new global multi-religious Faith-in-Action initiative to provide coordinated and evidence-based inter-faith support for the protection and well-being of children and their communities. UNICEF's Executive Director signed a joint global statement and call to action on the COVID-19 response with 12 of RfP's most senior religious leaders. <https://rfp.org/launch-of-global-multi-religious-faith-in-action-covid-19-initiative-2/>
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/launch-global-multi-religious-faith-action-covid-19-initiative>.

The initiative aims to mobilize religious leaders, faith communities, women of faith, and youth networks within RfP through its Inter-Religious Councils at country level to support COVID preparedness and response.

The key objectives of the campaign are to:

1. Manage communication, address misinformation and rumours
2. Dispel fear, stigma, discrimination, and promote social harmony
3. Promote adaptation of religious gatherings, practices, rituals, handwashing and hygiene
4. Address specific needs of vulnerable groups
5. Promote the prevention of violence against children and women
6. Promote the participation of children and young people and their active engagement in the initiative
7. Promote and support the recovery of social services, resilience and return to normalcy

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Faith-in-Action initiative has outlined the following strategies:

- High level advocacy at global, regional and country level
- Generation and analysis of faith-related behavioural evidence to inform action
- Development, dissemination and local customization of global guidance on key thematic issues
- Periodic webinars at the different levels for sharing of knowledge, issues and experiences
- Digital engagement and capacity development
- Tracking, monitoring and documentation of the results of the initiative.

Working with UNICEF, RfP and many other partners, JLI developed a Global Reference Document <https://jliflc.com/resources/multi-religious-faith-in-action-covid-19-initiative-reference-document-ed-1/> to inform the development of series of COVID-related specific thematic guides.

This package of thematic Guides is aligned with and are expected to support the achievement of each of the 7 objectives of the Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 global initiative as outlined in the background. **The Guides have been designed specifically for use, updating and adaptation by religious leaders, faith communities and FBOs at country and community-level with support from UNICEF** and other humanitarian and development partners to support the implementation of the Faith-in-Action initiative.

For questions on the guides please contact:
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**ADAPTING
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Series 1: Resource Guide for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities

ISSUES

During a global crisis people tend to turn to their religious leaders and faith communities for social, emotional, spiritual, and material support. National and global institutions, including religious, political, and health institutions, have put forward detailed guidelines for how we interact, congregate, worship and perform religious rites, including death and mourning rituals. Religious leaders use their authority and the trust and respect they command to promote these guidelines among their faith communities to ensure the continued safety and well-being of their communities. Some of the key issues are:

- **Social and Religious Gatherings:** The virus spreads when people come into close contact with each other. Religious gatherings and practices, which involve touching, hugging, and other types of close contact, are not recommended because they could cause the virus to spread very quickly. To halt the spread of the virus, religious meetings must stop or change for some time.
- **Hygiene and sanitization practices:** The virus can infect someone if they have contaminated hands and then touch their face, especially their nose, eyes, or mouth. Frequently washing hands and remembering not to touch the face are some of the most important prevention measures. Faith communities may spread the virus where surfaces in religious buildings are frequently touched, or through handshakes.

Many people have already had to change the way in which they meet for worship or other forms of service. The authorities in many countries have declared lockdowns enforcing physical distancing, but even in places without lockdowns, some religious leaders have chosen to cancel gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus among their community. While these steps are critical to slow the spread of the virus, these steps change the way we interact with each other in our faith communities; and some people might resist these changes.

Some places of worship may not have facilities for handwashing: washing stations will need to be created - this is also worthwhile for the long-term, as it will help prevent the spread of other diseases in the future. It is important for religious leaders to support and promote handwashing in homes, as well as in places of worship. It is important to have a plan for frequent disinfection and sanitising in places of worship.

ANACORTES, WASHINGTON, USA - APRIL 10, 2020: Good Friday services being livestreamed from Westminster Presbyterian Church with pastor Stephanie Hankey and musician John Van Deusen in an empty sanctuary. By Gregg Brekke



- **Change in rituals:** Many faith traditions involve physical contact between worshippers, kissing of objects, and sharing of items involved in rituals. These practices endanger communities and risk transmitting the virus between people through contact and physical proximity; they may contribute to an increase in the number of cases of the illness and deaths. Rites of passage related to death and burial may result in practices which put people at risk of transmitting the virus. Funerals and burials will need to happen in ways that are different from before and respect new physical distancing and hygiene measures.

Large numbers of people meeting together at a funeral will spread the virus. Even during mourning and funerals, faith communities need to be careful to practise health measures. Remember: do not let one death lead to more infections and deaths.

- **Resistance and mistrust:** Suspicion and resistance can follow calls for changes in or reduction of religious gatherings and physical distancing. There is a need for clear and correct information to explain the changes which are recommended, and to reiterate why they are important. Once people understand the risks connected to the virus, they will be more ready to take the necessary precautions. Religious leaders can use their influence and the trust they command to help their faith communities understand why we must all adapt our practices during this pandemic.

During the 2016 Ebola crisis, international and national organizations worked with imams, pastors, nuns and priests to change burial practices. Religious leaders used passages from the Bible and the Qur'an that showed that these new safe burial practices were still spiritually acceptable.

*Sandra Achieng and her mom Winnie at their home in Kibera. The Kenya government gave directives that all school to be closed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sandra always gets revision assignments from her classteacher via her father's smartphone.
By UNICEF/2020/ Brian Otieno*





WHAT CAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES DO

Religious leaders and faith communities contribute to the COVID-19 response by:



Preparing and partnering

- **Plan and Prepare:** Religious leaders and faith communities can plan a COVID-19 response in line with national and local guidance. This may include preparing and organizing this response by telephone or a video call, creating a health team, and developing a communication plan (for example, plan a phone tree – how will communication flow between each member of your faith community). Religious leaders can also guide and support their staff who provide religious support in medical settings, such as chaplains and staff in faith-based healthcare facilities.

The Religions for Peace has established the Multi-religious Humanitarian Fund and is supporting its movement (the Interreligious Councils including their Women of Faith Networks and Interfaith Youth Networks around the world). They are making plans, in accordance with national guidelines, and mobilizing communities from diverse religious traditions to respond to COVID-19. In Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, and Peru, just to name a few countries, the IRCs are developing and disseminating preventive messages, and communications that inspire hope and solidarity; delivering critical supplies of basic items, such as food, water and medication, to vulnerable communities; and providing spiritual counselling and social support.

<https://rfp.org/rfp-launches-the-multi-religious-humanitarian-fund-in-response-to-covid-19/>

The African Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP) is partnering with organizations such as IMA World Health to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in the DRC, Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. The partnership with IMA will focus on communication and education; working with religious leaders, schools and churches; dissemination of context-relevant guidelines and good practices; enhancing mechanisms of referral and tracing the virus in communities; and implementation of preventive and protective measures, such as setting up handwashing stations.

- **Partner with other groups:** Working together is critical in the pandemic response. Linking up with diverse faith-based and non-faith-based partners is important. These could include other denominations, faiths, and multi-faith organizations, such as Religions for Peace and its Interreligious Councils. Partnerships could also include non-governmental and community-based organizations such as those helping children, public health associations, the UN, and other multilateral organizations. Religious leaders can link with the UNICEF office in their country to become part of mechanisms for coordinating risk communication and community engagement and to participate in decisions that will affect faith communities.
- **Work closely with government authorities:** Religious leaders coordinate with national health authorities and public health officials to agree on how to adapt religious practices, rites of passage and gatherings. These decisions and good practices can be shared and communicated between religious leaders, partner organizations, administrators, and faith communities.





Adapting religious meetings, prayers and rituals

- **For some time, religious meetings will have to stop or change. Follow local or national guidance:** Local and national health authorities are the primary source of information about COVID-19 and can provide updates on restrictions on gatherings and the movement of people. Remember, the situation is changing fast, so check for the most recent information on whether gatherings are allowed. Also check if there are restrictions on the number of people who can gather, at what time, and in which locations. Authorities may seal off some areas and movement might be restricted in some cases.
- **Respect physical distancing.** If gatherings are allowed, consider the following guidelines:²
 - Gather only when it is absolutely essential. At all other times, try to organize virtual gatherings through live-streaming, television, radio, or social media. Speak out and explain to those who still want to gather why it is essential not to do this.
 - Restrict the number and flow of people entering, attending, and departing from places of worship. This may mean conducting multiple smaller services.
 - Always maintain a safe distance of at least one metre (three feet) between all people. Within families everyone need not be separated. They can stay together by forming a “support bubble”. A support bubble is defined as a group of familiar people with whom you have close physical contact. This system of “support bubble” is being tested in the UK for events and schools.
 - Consider alternative spaces such as outdoors where possible. The virus spreads more easily indoors. Maintain a distance of at least one metre even when gathering outdoors. If meeting outdoors is not possible, ensure the indoor space is well ventilated.
 - Several super-spreader events are linked to mass gatherings. Avoid events linked to singing in groups and similar activities (choirs, *kirtans* etc.) as singing is a common activity in many religious gatherings. Singing and in particular choirs could be grouped until the end of the outbreak – particularly for vulnerable groups.
 - Sanitize places of worship before and after gatherings.
- **Remind community members not to attend gatherings** if any member of their household has any symptoms of the virus, such as a fever or cough, or is more vulnerable to the virus: for example, the elderly or those with other health conditions.

The Uganda Episcopal Conference has told its formal and informal leaders not to lead any special meetings, such as Stations of the Cross, worship meetings or retreats. They must not organize any meeting where there are more than 10 people. The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) has given guidelines to priests. They must follow special rules to keep everything sanitized until the pandemic is over.³

- **Change worship practices as much as needed, but try to keep the essence and use the same words for rituals.** Explain what has changed and why – help people understand why these changes are necessary and how to understand them within your religious tradition. Give references to what religious teachings say about these changes. Give historical references of how religious adaptations have been made in the past in the face of crises and diseases.

The WHO has a decision tree to help religious leaders and communities to make good decisions about meetings. It will help them to know if it is safe to have a meeting of any kind. If there is a national or local order against gatherings and/or if there are cases of the virus in your area, you should not hold large religious gatherings to protect yourself and your community. Since religious gatherings pose a high risk of being super-spreader events, religious leaders need to devise mechanisms to keep track of who attends the service and how they can be contacted, in case a contact-tracing investigation is needed. Once public services resume, the organizers should still make all efforts to keep the event as short as possible and reduce the risk of transmission.

For Guidelines on Religious Practices, Pilgrimages and Mass Gatherings, please refer to below WHO docs:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/safe-ramadan-practices-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-interim-guidance>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-on-mass-gatherings-and-covid-19>



Encouraging hygiene and handwashing practices

- **Promote hygiene and handwashing:** Help those attending gatherings to maintain healthy hygiene practices by providing handwashing facilities before and after the event: this includes feet washing facilities for places where worshippers enter barefoot. Alcohol-based hand-rub (at least 70% alcohol) can be placed at the entrance and in the worship space.
 - **Assign monitors** to make sure that people wash their hands properly. This means washing hands with soap for 20 seconds and ensuring that they wash the thumbs, between each finger, and underneath the nails.
 - **People should change the water in a bowl after someone else has used it to wash their hands and feet**, as using the same water may pass the COVID-19 virus from one person to another.
 - **Foot-operated taps for handwashing facilities are a good way** to avoid having people touch taps and water outlets. There are low-cost ways to make these types of handwashing facilities.⁴
 - Where available, **place disposable tissues** within easy reach and use closed bins for disposal of tissues.
 - Ask worshippers to **bring their own personal prayer rugs** to place on the carpet for daily prayers.
 - When worshippers enter a site barefoot, **footwear should be placed: separately from the main worship space.**
 - **Using masks will not stop you from getting the virus**, but they can help to stop you spreading it to other people. Masks should be used with all other preventive measures, such as handwashing and physical distancing. Medical masks should be kept for health-care workers to use, but cloth masks can be made and used at home. Follow the advice on proper use of masks from the WHO.⁵
- **Discourage people from touching others or touching objects:** Even if people meet, they must not touch, kiss or hug each other. Restrict or minimise touching objects used in worship such as holy books, or symbols such as the crucifix, cups, bowls, and bells. Have a plan to disinfect and sanitize objects that are frequently touched. Create new ways for your community to greet one another that reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Some suggestions for limiting physical touch are:
 - Instead of hugs, kisses, and handshakes, encourage bowing or a sign of peace that ensures physical distance.
 - Greet people at the entry to worship spaces with friendly words and smiles, rather than handshakes or other forms of physical contact.
 - Bow before sacred statues or icons, instead of touching or kissing them.
 - Give blessings from at least one metre (three feet) away and discontinue the distribution of shared food or drinking from a common cup.
 - Consider using individual pre-packaged boxes/ servings of religious or ceremonial foods, rather than shared portions from communal containers.
 - Empty fountains of holy water to prevent people dipping their fingers into the same water as others.

Children in their school uniform thoroughly wash their hands with soap.
UNICEF/2017





Explore different ways to perform religious practices

Religious leaders are important community role models for promoting safety and prevention guidelines.

■ Adopt technology where possible:

- **Live-stream worship services** and ceremonies through social media. For example, where permitted, weddings may be conducted with essential attendees and other guests could join virtually. If live-streaming is not possible, record videos and audio, and broadcast them or post them on social media, for example through WhatsApp.

Religious practices have had to change in the past, as circumstances changed. When the the Jewish Temple was destroyed long ago, the Jews at that time had to think how to change their religious practices.

- **Broadcast services** live or pre-recorded for the community through local television and radio stations.
- **Create podcasts or live internet feeds** as a substitute for gatherings, religious classes for children, and other events. Seek help from internet providers and possibly younger members of the congregation who can advise about the best technology to use.

- **Conduct individual pastoral and care visits by phone** or through social media and video chat.
- **Use a remote or virtual meeting platform or teleconference facility** for meetings or small-group interactive prayer.
- **Record sermons and prayers, and share** them on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, or UNICEF's Internet of Good Things (IoGT).⁶
- **Remind people about staying safe online**, such as avoiding scams and online abuse, especially where children and vulnerable adults are concerned.

Not every faith community or community is able to access or use digital technology. In such cases, consider using telephones and social networks:

- **Use telephone calls and text chats** between members of the community for paired-up prayer.
- **Use a phone tree strategy** to communicate to faith community members by assigning a chain of people, with one person communicating a message to the next person who communicates to another person and so on, to pass new messages between community members.
- **Communicate specific timings** when your faith community can observe religious practices, despite being physically apart.
- **Encourage individual and household observance of prayer** and other spiritual practices.
- **Compile and circulate requests for prayers** from the faith community to be prayed for by all members.
- **Use local radio** to communicate with members of the faith community and with the wider community.

The Won Buddhist temple in Gangnam, Seoul, South Korea, organizes public online streaming of prayer services. This allows believers with access to the internet to take part regularly in religious practices while respecting physical distancing. The Tricycle website offers a collection of online reflections and teachings, helping people practise their religion during the pandemic.

Sydney, Australia - 2020-04-02: Church closed because of COVID-19 pandemic. A sign states that online Sunday services will be held via Facebook.

By Daria Nipot





Adaptations of funerals and burial practices

Life and death rituals are based on very deeply held beliefs, and changes to funerals and burial practices can be difficult to accept. Religious leaders can help grieving families ensure that their departed loved ones receive respectful, appropriate funerals and, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing how to plan and perform funeral rituals and worship services safely can both protect and comfort mourners, and also show respect for those who have died without causing further health risks to the mourners. Religious leaders can work with families to integrate and adapt appropriate religious and cultural practices for final rites by keeping in mind the following:

- Follow the WHO's guidelines for burials and funerals.⁷ If washing the body is part of your faith tradition, however, **those in contact with the body should use personal protective equipment (disposable gowns, face shields or goggles and medical masks) and observe strict hygiene practices.**
- If the family of the deceased wishes to view the body, they may be allowed to do so, in accordance with physical distancing restrictions, with no touching or kissing of the body and thorough handwashing before and after viewing.
- Funerals should be attended by only those closest to the deceased and attendance kept to the smallest number of people possible. Those attending should observe physical distancing and handwashing rules, and may choose to wear a mask as an additional precaution.
- As modifications to burial and funeral rites are adopted, **pay attention to the particular needs of children, older adults, and other vulnerable groups** in attendance. Older people, children, and those with underlying health conditions should not directly interact with the body and are advised to participate virtually in the funeral.

People will understand the need for change better if religious leaders can discuss the issue in detail, with good scientific information on burial, coupled with advice on the spiritual aspects of death and funerals. Different religious traditions have published new advice on burials and funerals in the light of COVID-19. Check with your own religious authorities for more information. We have also included some links to advice from different religions at the end of the document.

*Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, uses an iPhone to livestream Catholic outdoor services.
By Tom Sampson*



RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS AND SACRED TEXTS

Religious leaders are in a position to lead communities to adapt their religious practices. The following are religious texts and historical evidence that can be used to explain and support the changes.

Buddhism

- “Mindful handwashing helps to make us more careful and gives us more opportunities to be mindful in our daily lives” (Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo, a respected monk in the Theravada forest tradition).
- In Dhammapada (verse 204) it is stated that Buddha remarked, “Arōgā paramā lābhā,” which means health is the ultimate profit. Therefore, Buddhism emphasizes the benefit of being healthy and the importance of doing all one can to be “disease-free.”

Islam

- Cleanliness has great importance in Islam and the Holy Qur’an emphasizes personal and environmental cleanliness. According to religious scholars, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has emphatically provided specific guidance to maintain cleanliness. The faith endorses the belief that a noble soul can reside only in a clean body and that one can obtain inner purity by maintaining outer cleanliness. The Qur’an and Hadith provide guidance. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:
 - “O you who believe! When you prepare for prayers, wash your face; wash your hands and arms unto the elbow. Rub your heads with water and wash your feet to the ankles” (Qur’an 5: 6)
 - “Islam is purity, so purify ourselves, for certainly no one enters paradise unless you are pure. (Hadith narrated by Imam Muslim)
 - “Neither the prayer is accepted without purification, nor is charity accepted out of the ill-gotten.” (Hadith narrated by Imam Muslim)



A Sikh religious leader, wearing a mask, offers prayers at a Gurudwara in India
By Ashutosh Sharma

✝ Christianity

- Christian traditions emphasize the use of water and water is considered in the scriptures as a symbol of purification and of life. (Leviticus 14 and 15).
- John 3:5 says: "...Amen, Amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit."
- Galatians 3:27: "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." The water of baptism purifies. John 9:11-12: "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me Go to Siloam and wash. So I went there and washed and was able to see." This was a symbolic cleansing from sin.
- The Hebrews were well acquainted with the use of mineral and vegetable alkalis for increasing the cleansing properties of water (Job 9:30: "If I should wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with life...") (Facts for Life via FBOs 34).

ॐ Hinduism

- "In the Hindu tradition, the cardinal virtue is non-harming (ahimsā). When necessitated by circumstances, such as the current conditions of a global pandemic, the supremacy of ahimsā requires that we adapt traditional rituals and religious practices to ensure that human life is protected.
- The Bhagavad Gita (4:38) teaches that right knowledge (jñāna) is the greatest purifier. Our practice of ahimsā, therefore, should be informed by knowledge derived from trustworthy sources. In the case of the COVID-19 virus, medical science is our most reliable source of knowledge guiding those practices that we are obliged to adopt in order to protect human life.

Along with non-harming, the Bhagavad Gita repeatedly commends the practice of cleanliness (saucam). Most Hindu rituals require the washing of hands before and during the performance of rituals. Saucam is entirely consistent with the hygienic and sanitization practices required for limiting the spread of diseases like Covid-19." Prof. Anantanand Rambachan, "Professor of Religion, St. Olaf College and Co-President, Religions for Peace"

✡ Judaism

- "Talmudic guidance ... cautions against the danger of transporting disease from one place to another (Taanit 21b); affirms the need to stay at home at a time of plague and maintain social distancing (Bava Kama 60b, Ketubot 77b); and also provides strict guidelines for maintaining hygiene, especially the importance of regular washing of hands and feet (Shabbat 108b).
- These injunctions are codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) such as in Yoreh Deah 116:5, where Rabbi Moses Isserlis states that we are obligated in such times to do our utmost to avoid contagion of self and others and that it is forbidden to rely on miracles."

From Jewish Teaching in the Face of Pandemics, by Chief Rabbi David Rosen, International Director, Department of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Co-President, Religions for Peace

A priest and a devotee wear masks and maintain social distance while offering prayers at a temple in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India By Ashutosh Sharma





IDEAS FOR DIALOGUE AND ACTION

For religious leaders, your position and the role of faith becomes even more central in these troubled times. People will have a lot of questions and there may not always be easy answers. The documents in the Multi-Faith Action for COVID-19 initiative provide more guidance on all of these topics and you can consult them for further information. As a starting place alongside your adaptations to religious gatherings and practice, you can also consider the following:

How have others adapted their religious gatherings and practices, and what can you learn from them?



How can you, as a faith community, adapt religious gatherings and practices to fit the varying needs of your members, while also maintaining safe health measures during COVID-19?

Share an example of collaboration with local authorities for adapting your religious gatherings and practices. Share your written example by email (no more than 50 words) and a photo (150 pixels) if you have one.

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CONNECT BACK WITH US!



How can you, as a faith community, create opportunities for sharing accurate information and help counter misinformation?



What are the common rumours/misinformation that you have heard/ read that are being circulated in your community? What is the correct information from WHO and national authorities to counter the rumors and misinformation?





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. The World Health Organization's page for Faith Based Organizations and Faith Leaders, including key recommendations for religious practices and a "decision tree" to help religious leaders decide whether it is safe to gather in person: <https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/faith-based-organizations-and-faith-leaders>
2. The World Health Organization's guidance on practical tips for religious leaders and faith communities about Covid-19 education, preparedness and response: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
3. The Center for Disease Control's (CDC) page for faith communities, including a full checklist of actions for community and religious leaders and guidance on how to disinfect your religious building: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>
4. Islamic Relief Worldwide's guidance on safe religious practice for Muslim communities during the coronavirus pandemic: <https://www.islamic-relief.org/islamic-relief-launches-guidance-on-safe-religious-practice-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>
5. World Vision's COVID-19: Guidance for Faith Communities & Places of Worship, including information on protecting staff, developing continuity plans, caring for communities, and providing psychosocial support: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/faithresponsetocovid19>
6. Preparing Your Church for Coronavirus Manual, including the Coronavirus Church Planning Template: <https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/academic-centers/humanitarian-disaster-institute/covid-19/>
7. Emory Interfaith Health platform – COVID-19 Resources for Faith Communities <http://ihpemory.org/covid-19-resources-for-faith-communities/>

Here are some resources that can provide advice on the details of funeral and burial practices, but there are also many other guidance documents published every day in this area. Check with your national or local religious council to see if they have guidance.

- The Fiqh Council of North America's guidance "Prayer and Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19"
- "COVID-19 and Islamic burial laws: safeguarding dignity of the dead," from Dr Ahmed Al-Dawoody, the legal adviser for Islamic law and jurisprudence at the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2020/04/30/covid-19-islamic-burial-laws/>
- The Massachusetts Council of Churches' [Guidelines for Christian funerals during COVID-19](#)
- The Hindu Forum of Britain has issued a [Corona Virus Health Awareness Announcement](#) with information about burials and funerals.
- The Whitefield Hebrew Congregation's [Guidance on Jewish life during coronavirus](#), including burials and funerals, 30 March 2020, <https://www.thewhc.co.uk/jewish-life-during-coronavirus/>

Photo credits (clockwise):

Four people wearing medical masks join their hands in prayer during a Buddhist cremation ceremony in Bangkok, Thailand, 18 April 2020
By Junjira Limcharoen

A devotee in a mask, offers prayers at a temple in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India.
By Ashutosh Sharma

A man prays from a distance through an open window of a temple in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India.
By Ashutosh Sharma

April 18, 2020: A priest wearing a mask, blesses the paksa bread on Easter Saturday in St. Elizabeth Church in Lviv, Ukraine.
By Ruslan Lytvyn

Endnotes

1. This is the WHO's decision tree on religious gatherings: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-tree-religious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a_2
2. This is the WHO's advice for religious leaders and faith communities: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
3. This is the statement from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa on adapted practices: <http://amecea.blogspot.com/2020/03/kenya-covid-19-guidelines-from.html>
4. This is an instruction guide on how to build a Tippy Tap: <http://www.tippytap.org/build-a-tippy-tap-manual>
5. This is the WHO's guidance on the use of masks: [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)
6. Internet of Good Things (IoGT) is a set of free, mobile-ready web-based resources and applications that bring good to your life by helping you and your community access educational and life-saving information: <https://www.internetofgoodthings.org>
7. This is the WHO's guidance on burials and funerals: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf

JOINT CALL TO ACTION

for the Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative by the UNICEF Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, and 13 of Religions for Peace's Senior-most leaders representing diverse religious traditions:

1. **Religious practices:** Adapt faith gatherings, rituals, and services to ensure the safety of worshippers and develop alternative pastoral approaches.
2. **Hygiene:** Promote a heightened focus on handwashing, hygiene and sanitation.
3. **Active listening:** Listen to the experiences, needs and hopes of children and families and provide support for inter-generational dialogue.
4. **Advocacy:** Promote the inclusion of voices of faith and wider community engagement to inform local responses.
5. **Communication and inclusion:** Tackle misinformation, rumours, stigma and discrimination associated with the disease.
6. **Active engagement:** Engage networks of religious communities including faith-based women's and youth organizations in collaboration with local governance structures to provide organized voluntary services.
7. **Pastoral Care:** Provide further spiritual and emotional care and support to bring comfort and hope for parents, children, and the elderly.
8. **Parenting:** Promote positive age and gender-specific parenting guidance and support to families, particularly the most vulnerable and the hardest to reach.
9. **Youth engagement:** Practice youth-friendly communication and engagement including more systematic use of technology and social media during periods of physical distancing and beyond.
10. **Recovery:** Provide support for recovery of social services.

Signatories:

Ms. Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director

Dr. Vinu Aram, Director, Shanti Ashram

Rev. Kosho Niwano, President-Designate, Rissho Kosei-Kai

H.E. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, President, Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi

H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Metropolitan of France, Ecumenical Patriarchate

Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative to the UN, Bahá'í International Community

Mr. Homi Gandhi, President, Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America

The Most Rev. Antje Jackelen, Archbishop of Uppsala, Primate of Sweden, Church of Sweden

H.E. Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje, Grand Mufti, Uganda

H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja, Nigeria

Ms. Aruna Oswal, Vice-President, World Jain Confederation

Grand-Father Dominique Rankin, Algonquin Hereditary Grand Chief

Chief Rabbi David Rosen, KSG CBE, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, OBE KSG, Chairman, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha

<https://rfp.org/launch-of-global-multi-religious-faith-in-action-covid-19-initiative/>

