Faith leaders: Supporting communities and safe practice

This document summarises the World Health Organization (WHO)'s advice and guidance for [Faith-based organisations and faith leaders](#), and considers how faith leaders can apply it.

While churches and church leaders will be experiencing all sorts of challenges during this global crisis, it is very important that they carefully consider the influential role that local churches can play at the moment. This significant role became clear in [the context of responding to Ebola](#), as the WHO acknowledges:

> '[Churches and church] leaders can play **a major role in saving lives and reducing illness related to Covid-19.** They are a primary source of support and comfort for their members. Often trusted more than governments or health-agencies, faith leaders can share health information to protect their communities that will be more likely to be accepted than from other sources.
>
> '[Churches] can promote helpful information, reduce fear and stigma, and provide reassurance to people in their communities. Because faith leaders are integrated into their communities through service and compassionate networks, they are often able to reach the most vulnerable among us with assistance and health information. **In short, they are a critical link in the safety net for vulnerable people in their communities.'**
>
> **World Health Organization**[1]

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[1] See WHO (2020) [Faith-based organisations and faith leaders](#)

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In addition to this encouragement by the WHO, the Bible invites each local church to be a community of love, hope and peace. The local church is a community through which God works to bring his kingdom, and to redeem and restore all of creation (see Bible study on Being church during Covid-19).
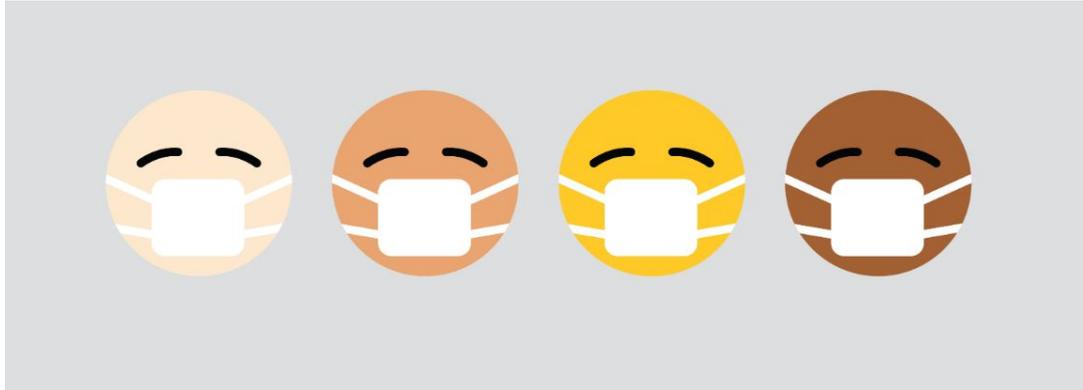
Practical support church leaders can offer during the pandemic:

- Share evidence-based information from trustworthy sources about Covid-19 preparedness, and response, including Tearfund resources on Communicating health protection information and Addressing rumours and misinformation

- Provide pastoral and spiritual support during public health emergencies and other health challenges

- Advocate for the needs of vulnerable populations, reach the most vulnerable with assistance and health information, and identify those most in need

- Prevent and reduce fear and stigma (see Bible study 'Distancing' and the good Samaritan)

- Provide reassurance to people in their communities (see Bible study Dealing with fear and anxiety)

- Ensure that any group gatherings for worship, education or social reasons are based on a sound risk assessment and are in line with guidance from national and local authorities (see Bible study Creative use of digital technology)

- Encourage collaboration and peaceful coexistence (with other faith and secular groups) (see Bible study Loving our neighbours)

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Changes to church and religious practices[2]

The following resources, adapted from WHO guidance, offer practical advice to ensure church and religious activities and rituals comply with government guidelines and restrictions:

- [Pastoral care, mental health and resilience](#)

- [Conducting church gatherings (where permitted)](#)

- [Conducting church services remotely/virtually](#)

- [Safe ceremonies](#)

- [Safe burial practices](#)

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[2] This material has been adapted from the WHO'S guidance for [Faith-based organisations and faith leaders](#).
Always check with national health authorities first. Local and national health authorities are the primary source of information and advice about Covid-19 in communities and can provide information about locally mandated restrictions.

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