



# THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

*Transforming Lives and Communities*

*Go therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost:  
Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* Matthew 28:19-20a

Rev. Dr. Mary Day Miller, Executive Minister

Rev. Gary Ludwig, President

11 March 2020

Dear TABCOM family,

By now we are all aware of the challenges facing us because of the COVID-19 virus. Our governor has declared a state of emergency and many of us are dealing with impacts on our schools, workplaces, and families.

As churches, we need to take action both to protect our communities and to reduce the anxiety and fear that people are experiencing during this public health crisis. In that spirit, I am sharing the following recommendations:

## **WORSHIP:**

Churches face decisions, now and in the future, about cancelling worship services. We have been especially advised to avoid gatherings over 50 people; so our larger churches will have a more difficult decision. For those continuing to hold worship, these considerations are advised:

**Greetings:** At as we greet one another or Pass the Peace, we should do so without physical touch of any kind. A gentle bow or a nod can be substituted. In your sanctuary, **spread out!**, Create some distance between persons.

**Offerings:** Offering plates should not be passed among the people. Plates or baskets should be placed in a location where the people may leave their offering. Note: we have been advised that the virus cannot be transmitted on a check that is mailed in, or any other “snail mail” correspondence.

**Virtual Worship:** Consider live streaming or podcasting your services for those who elect not to attend, and to prepare for the possible cancellation of live worship in the future. An excellent resource from Hacking Christianity: <https://tinyurl.com/v9q7t31>

As the weather improves, outdoor worship is an excellent way to greatly reduce risk.

**Who should forego worship gatherings:** Persons who feel, or within the past two weeks, have felt unwell or run a fever should be discouraged from attending church services or events, both for their own protection and the protection of others. If anyone in a household is unwell, everyone in the household should remain at home.

In particular, the following persons who are at particular risk from COVID -19 should take extra precautions: persons age 60 or over, anyone with a respiratory condition such as asthma or emphysema, anyone with an autoimmune disorder, anyone who is undergoing or has recently received chemotherapy, and smokers.

## **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Cleaning:** Make sure to **wipe every surface** that is often touched with disinfectant: doorknobs, handrails, the tops of pews.



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**Food service:** Food served at coffee hour, feeding programs or other gatherings should be in individual servings. If food is not in individual servings, a person wearing a new pair of food service gloves should be assigned to pre-plate and serve the food. Serving utensils should be handled only by the person preparing and serving the food.

**Virtual meetings** are encouraged where possible. Church or program staff may be encouraged to work from home, provided their physical presence is not required. Some free or low-cost online meeting platforms include: Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, Cisco Webex Meetings, and Microsoft Teams.

**Pastoral Care:** Please be aware that pastors may need to reduce or eliminate their physical presence in hospitals and nursing homes. Many facilities are already limiting such visits. We have had our first case of a US pastor contracting this illness. Pastors do not want to become unintentional carriers by entering high-risk areas; in addition many pastors have family members in high-risk groups, or are themselves at high risk. Prayer by phone or video can indeed be Spirit-filled.

**During this time, please organize to check regularly on your elderly members, especially those who live alone.**

Let us remember that these precautions are intended to protect the most vulnerable among us, which is our sacred trust as Christians. *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)*

Please be alert for announcements regarding TABCOM and Association Gatherings, as we anticipate that some meetings and events will need to be rescheduled.

This situation is very fluid with new information coming in several times per day. These recommendations may change in the coming days and TABCOM will endeavor to make the most current information and guidance available to clergy, church leaders, members and friends of our congregations.

Serving Christ,

*Rev. Mary D. Miller*

Rev. Dr. Mary Day Miller, Executive Minister

*Some information gleaned from publications by the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church. Thank you, friends!*