

March 3, 2020

Follen Church Response to COVID-19

Dear Follen Members and Friends,

As infections from the COVID-19 coronavirus spread, it is important that we also spread information on how to prepare for and prevent this disease in our community and congregation. There is information about COVID-19 everywhere; two excellent resources are a recent *New York Times* [podcast](#), and this [article](#). At this point in time, with active cases in Rhode Island and now Massachusetts, it seems clear that coronavirus will affect our community directly. This virus is most dangerous for elders and people with compromised lungs and immune systems.

Our [Safe Congregation Group](#) consists of the President (Rosemary Trowbridge), Vice President (Howie Bernstein), co-chair of Lay Ministry (Tom Blumenthal), Director of Religious Education (Beryl Aschenberg), and the Minister (myself). We are tasked with caring for the emotional and physical safety of our congregation, with our priority being our most vulnerable members. Anne Kelly, a member of our Board, has been asked by the Board to support the Safety Group as well. We will be the team that offers communication and direction in the event that this pandemic spreads throughout Massachusetts.

Our Safety Policy says, “It is ultimately the responsibility of the entire congregation, not just those in leadership positions, or formally signed Members, but all community participants, to create and maintain a climate that supports the growth and welfare of everyone in the congregation.” As one journalist wrote in the *Scientific American*: “Preparing for the almost inevitable global spread of this virus...is one of the most pro-social, altruistic things you can do in response to potential disruptions of this kind.” And so all of us--staff, leaders, and congregation--need to take part in the response to this virus. As we go forward, here are a few things all Follenites can do to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and congregation:

1. “Don’t work sick, don’t school sick, don’t church sick.” If you are sick, or a family member is sick, please stay home. We know this virus is most dangerous to our elders and those with compromised lungs or immune systems, so please think of them--even if you feel “good enough” to go out. Needing to stay home if sick also applies to staff. If there is a quarantine of some sort put in place, staff may need to work from home for an extended period of time.
2. Please reach out to minister@follen.org or layministers@follen.org or others to let us know if you or someone you know is sick! We don’t want to share germs, but we also don’t want folks to feel lonely. There are a lot of ways we can stay in touch.

3. Wash your hands, clean often-used surfaces like doorknobs and phones, avoid shaking hands, cough into your elbow...all the things we can do to wash away germs and not share them with others. More basic tips are in [The Scientific American](#).
4. If you have traveled recently to a country or state that has a high level of outbreak, even if you do not have symptoms, please consider self-quarantining until the danger of infection has passed. We know that people without symptoms can pass the virus to others.
5. Let [me](#) know if you have trouble stocking up on food and medical supplies or paying for medical care, or if staying home from work becomes a financial emergency. The Minister's Discretionary Fund is here to help.
6. Useful tips from the CDC, with regards to pandemic: [Planning Tip Sheet](#) [What to Expect](#)
7. Useful tips from the Dr. Julie Hackett, Superintendent of the Lexington Public Schools: [LPS Coronavirus information](#)

And, here are steps our Safe Congregation Group may ask the congregation to take, depending on the severity of the pandemic:

1. If the Massachusetts Department of Health and/or our Governor ask us to avoid large gatherings, we may need to move our worship and meetings to online. Minister, staff, and lay leaders may use Zoom, Facebook Live, pre-recorded videos, or other methods to continue the work and worship of the congregation. We will announce to the congregation via the website, newsletter, and facebook if we need to begin these precautions. We could create online covenant groups or other ways to connect. Share your ideas with us, and please support us as we figure out how to serve our mission in the face of this challenge.
2. If you are in an Action Team or other group, please read carefully these two checklists and figure out what your team or sub-team can do to help Follen Church respond:
 - [Long] From the CDC: [Faith Community Checklist](#)
 - [Short] The United Church of Christ adapted the above into a checklist that has more direct correlations to our congregational teams: [Church Checklist](#)

If you are feeling anxious about all of this – and everything else that is going on in the world – you are not alone. Please reach out to me or layministers@follen.org or any other Follen friend. Connect and stay in touch. We are not alone, and we can support each other through this time.

With love,

Rev. Claire