



Mayor's Center for Faith
and Community Partnerships

Coronavirus FAQ for Faith Leaders

As of Monday, March 30th, 12pm – Please note that guidance is subject to change

- **Can we hold services, either indoors or outdoors?**
 - You should not hold any in-person services either indoors or outdoors. You should hold virtual services instead (e.g., webinars, skype) or connect via phone.

- **Can we hold services or gather for holidays like Easter or Passover, either indoors or outdoors?**
 - You should not hold any in-person services or holiday gatherings either indoors or outdoors. Faith community members should observe at home and if acceptable hold virtual services (e.g., webinars, skype) or connect via phone.

- **We have been holding worship/sermons/prayers via livestream, based from our house of worship. Is that permitted?**
 - You should not hold any in-person services, but a faith leader may record their sermon at their house of worship for online broadcast with a small crew of relevant personnel (camera person, sound person, musician, etc...). The faith leader and personnel must maintain appropriate distance in compliance with social distancing guidance, and there cannot be an in-person audience.

- **The Mayor mentioned that some houses of worship may face fines or could be shut down. What does that look like?**
 - The City will be enforcing social-distancing rules with respect to religious gatherings. The City will issue summonses or close the building if necessary to protect public health.

- **We have many functions in addition to religious services that happen in our space, such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and food pantries. Can any of these continue? Do they need to be outdoors?**
 - We recommend moving to virtual meetings whenever possible.
 - We encourage emergency food providers to continue operations to provide critical services to food insecure New Yorkers in a way that is safe for everyone.
 - Grab and Go is an effective strategy to ensure those who need access to food receive it with limited interaction and while practicing social distancing. All food shelf stable or prepared items should adhere to NYC food standards.
 - Where possible, expand pick-up hours to decrease the number of people who visit at a given time.
 - Discourage lines and groups by offering, where appropriate, diverse pre-bagged items (ie family size, dietary restrictions, etc).
 - If capacity permits, increase emergency packages to last up to 14 days to reduce frequency of visits.
 - Include information about COVID-19 to keep New Yorkers safe and healthy.



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- All students 18 and under can pick up food at from specific Department of Education sites, Monday through Friday, from 7:30-am to 1:30pm.
- All seniors can get food from a senior center, even if they are not a regular attendee.

- **We are worried about the homeless populations we support. What is happening in homeless shelters?**
 - You can find specific guidance for homeless shelters on the NYC Health Department's website.
 - The Department of Social Services (DSS) is coordinating closely with City Hall and the NYC Health Department to ensure all agencies are informed and have distributed educational materials. Street outreach workers are working to identify street homeless individuals who may be experiencing possible symptoms and connecting them to resources. DSS has protocols in place for staff and clients who are experiencing possible symptoms.

- **We have large networks of faith-based volunteers, and the faith community is eager to assist. Where can we plug in? How can we coordinate with the city to do things like bring food to older adults, recruit back-up healthcare staff, and help provide other essential services?**
 - Staying home as much as possible, maintaining good hand and cough/sneezing hygiene, and practicing social distancing when you have to go out, are key to prevent continued spread of COVID-19. See the NYC Health Department's fact sheet for more information on how you can help slow the spread and protect those at higher risk of severe COVID-19 related complications.
 - Go to NYC Service to learn how your community-based organization, or you as an individual, can safely support COVID-19 response efforts.
 - Older people and people who are sick need to take extra precautions and may have difficulty meeting basic needs, such as buying groceries or picking up medicine. If there is someone in your congregation or community that you know cannot leave the house because they are sick or at increased risk, you can assist those people. But please avoid direct contact with such individuals to protect you and them. For example, call them when you are outside and leave groceries on the doorstep.

- **Is the city facilitating any kind of financial relief for congregations whose income is going down but who want to continue to pay operations staff and stay afloat?**
 - At this time, the city is not providing any specific financial help to faith-based organizations. We will keep you updated about federal and other support for non-profit organizations.

- **If there are restrictions on leaving homes, can clergy be granted any special status to move about to sanctuaries or hospitals as needed, etc.?**
 - Clergy can contact Empire State Development to request designation as essential. However, this may not override protocols for visits in hospitals, nursing homes, etc.