



THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA & THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

12 Carlton Crescent
Kingston 10
Jamaica W.I.
Telephone: (876) 926-6059 / 8734
Telephone: (876) 619- 2924 / 2925
Fax: (876) 929-0826
Email: synod@ucjci.com

Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian

Ref. No. GS/NS 2414

September 16, 2020

ADVISORY #24 TO: UCJCI MINISTERS, LAY PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONAL BOARDS RE: COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

My sisters and brothers,

Greetings,

The UCJCI COVID-19 Response Team now meets every two weeks. Consequently, these updates will follow the scheduled meetings.

Following are the reminders and decisions taken by the Team, which met yesterday, September 15, 2020, under the various headings. **New/updated information is in bold print.**

1. Compliance with National Orders/Protocols

We celebrate the fact that Cayman is now COVID-19 free. Consequently, masks are no longer mandatory although social distancing rules remain in place. Schools have resumed with no remote learning.

In Jamaica, we are experiencing community spread across the island with a daily increase in the number of persons who have contracted the disease, increasing deaths, combined with a fall in the recovery rate, which currently stands at 28.3%.

We continue to encourage compliance with the directives and recommendations of the legitimate state authorities in both nations.

2. Common COVID-19 Issues

The committee reflected on some troubling issues caused by the pandemic, which are common among all four regions as under:

- **The fellowship gap – the inability of some people to either attend worship or to have physical contact with others.**
- **Those being left behind (numbered among the vulnerable group, some with no access to technology and with limited connection to the church community).**
- **The ministry to children and youth.**

Moderator: Rt. Rev. Dr. Gordon Cowans, **General Secretary:** Rev. Norbert D. Stephens,
Regional Deputy General Secretaries: Mrs. Maureen Henry, Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble Bloomfield, Rev. Dr. Henry Samuels, Mrs. Rose Wedderburn

Registered Charity Organization

Registration Number: CA100-57C

- A sense of weariness among categories of workers (first responders [health, security, transportation, cleaners], educators, etc.).
- Concern regarding the education of our children in Jamaica (lack of internet access and/or devices, uncertainly about the learning model).
- Those facing economic challenges.
- Those experiencing psychological issues.
- Spiritual dryness among persons at all levels.

Please note that at the Synodical level a number of actions have already taken place and will take place in order to respond to these issues.

The committee is encouraging you and your congregation(s) where possible, to continue to, or to identify ways of engaging and/or responding to these issues.

Some ideas to complement already existing initiatives in your congregations and charges are as under:

- For the month of October 2020, congregations may wish to have special services for first responders in their congregation or community, where these persons are recognized, encouraged and prayed for. The same could be done for children, parents and teachers who will be returning to school in Jamaica.
- Where possible offering tablets/devices and back to school materials to needy children in your congregation/community.
- In addition to contact via cell phones, as a means of encouragement, consider writing letters to shut-in/stay at home members or offer/send tokens (bearing in mind sanitation protocols).
- Share your ideas/activities of how some of these issues may be addressed or are being addressed with the wider church community.

3. Congregational Life

Church Worship

- Most of the United Churches in **Cayman** have resumed services in their sanctuaries.
- The church in **Jamaica** is allowed to gather for worship under a number of conditions. We have, however, received reports that in some cases, persons have not been following some of the protocols, including the wearing of masks and physical distancing. **Given the recent spike in confirmed cases, we strongly urge you to ensure that all of the following conditions are met for Sunday worship in your congregation(s):**
 - Distancing rule of one person per 40 sq. ft., with persons being at least 6 feet apart. All persons are required to observe the physical distancing rule, however, families can sit together.
 - **Outside of the sanctuary, all gatherings are limited to 15 persons under physical distancing rules.**
 - Have multiple services. (The same persons should not be present in multiple services.)
 - We are recommending that a record of the persons attending the service, including their contact number, be kept in order to assist the health authorities in their contact tracing process, in the event of a confirmed case among attendees.
 - Temperature checks prior to entering the sanctuary. We strongly recommend the use of infrared thermometers.

- Ensure sanitization measures are in place at entrances.
 - All persons must wear a mask.
 - Choirs are not allowed.
 - Air conditioning units are not to be used in the sanctuary.
 - The Stay-at-Home Order applies to persons aged 75 years and over. All our lay pastors and retired minister within this age range should abide by this rule and should engage their congregation or charge remotely. Your Regional Mission Council will be in touch with you to assist, where possible, in facilitating remote services and meetings.
- The expectation of the health authorities is that the cases in Jamaica will continue to rise for the next few weeks. In order to safeguard the health of our members and adherents our expectation is that you will ensure that these guidelines are strictly enforced.
 - We strongly suggest that gatherings, outside of worship (meetings, bible studies etc.), be held remotely to minimize in person contact and so limit the spread of the disease.
 - **Funeral Services are not allowed at this time. Burials are permitted with a maximum of 15 persons including, pastor, family members and cemetery/grave personnel.**
 - We encourage you during this period to include in your worship services, prayers and other expressions of solidarity with members and adherents who have suffered recent bereavement, including those due to COVID-19.
 - Based on the social distancing rules, coupled with the warning from the state authorities of the spike in the number of confirmed cases, we do not endorse adult baptism at this time. However, we will be engaging our congregations in a time of reflection on the theology of baptism and conversations on the practices of baptism in light of COVID-19.
 - We encourage the continuation of streamed services and sharing on social media, as some persons will still not be able to attend worship services.
 - We remind you of the time of prayer every Wednesday between 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. We will share with you the specific suggested foci for each week.
 - We continue to distribute the weekly House Worship Liturgy, using a thematic approach with sermon/reflection notes. We welcome feedback on how this is being used within the church.
 - Tune in each Sunday to LOVE 101 FM in Jamaica at 3:30 p.m. for a rebroadcast of a congregational worship service or the sharing of reflections or activities by the UCJCI.

4 Pastoral Care

- Given the psychological impact of the restriction of movement caused by the coronavirus, we celebrate those persons who continue to call members and offer inspirational messages and other support systems. Regional Counsellors have been appointed, and this ministry is available in all regions.
- **We continue to encourage congregations and regions to be especially sensitive to the needs of the elderly.** Please ensure that their basic needs are met (food, sanitization, medication) and, where possible, offer daily contact by phone or social media to those who live alone.
- We also encourage you to engage your congregants to determine their access to, and understanding of, the digital space in order to gauge our reach as a church.

5. Synod and Regional Offices

In an effort to mitigate any risk of Covid-19 infection among staff while maximizing productivity, please note the following which will guide our operations:

The Synod Administrative Centre and each Regional Office (Jamaica) will open for 2 days per week, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Cayman Regional Office will operate its normal working hours.

6. Communication

Please continue to pay close attention to the various pieces of information sent to you via our communication channels (radio, e-mail, website [www.ucjci.com], WhatsApp Messenger, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook).

May we together continue to depend on God, *who has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love and of power and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7).

Sincerely,

THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



Norbert D. Stephens (Rev.)
General Secretary