Allegheny East Conference Coronavirus Action Plan

Updated August 18, 2020

In response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Allegheny East Conference, after prayerful consideration, legal counsel and consideration of best practices, is outlining the following measures detailed below to promote the safety of our churches, schools, and surrounding communities.

Please note that this action plan reflects where we are now, but it will be adjusted and updated as the situation develops.

Church Re-Entry Process
We have a 5-step Re-entry Process that pastors must follow before they are approved to re-enter the church building. That document is on our website at visitaec.org/covid19.

Gatherings

- The AEC Administration is aware that there are some states within our territory where stay-at-home orders and gathering restrictions have been lifted for faith-based communities. Within our territory, 75% of our churches are located in states that recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases. Because safety is our number one priority, AEC has adopted the philosophy of “no lives lost” due to the premature reopening of our church buildings. Our reopening process will be cautious, gradual, and strategic. Therefore, at this time, all Allegheny East Conference church buildings will remain closed until further notice. This includes special services such as funerals and weddings.

- We have secured a team of medical experts with whom we will consult in determining the safest way to reopen our buildings. Additionally, we will continue to monitor and evaluate information and guidelines from the CDC, WHO, local states, and other reputable agencies.

- Furthermore, in an abundance of caution, ALL congregations are to find alternate ways to worship other than gathering at the church or the usual meeting place until further notice. Some of those alternatives include the following:
  - Live streaming, video conferencing, free conference calls, etc.
Churches that wish to engage in small groups ministries should only do so virtually.

Work groups at the church (e.g. live streaming team or treasury staff) are to follow the guideline of groups 10 or less.

If someone within a small group has been diagnosed with COVID-19, (or is exhibiting symptoms), they should not gather until they have been issued a clean bill of health from their doctor and must follow all governmental/ conference guidelines for reintegration in public spaces.

- **Church Gatherings Outside of the Church Facility.** Churches must refrain from holding church-sponsored events at other facilities or outside spaces, such as parks, beaches, and public spaces, etc.

- **Drive-in Worship Services:** If a pastor has an interest in conducting drive-thru services, AEC Administration is now open to accepting formal requests. Interested pastors should submit their request to the Ministerial Department, along with the completed “Drive-in Church Service Readiness Checklist” document. Each request will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

- **Churches Live Streaming/Recording in Church Building.** Guidelines have been formulated to ensure safety. They can be found on the visitaec.org/covid19

- **Outdoor Services:** For those churches interested in holding outdoor services, the pastor must complete outdoor services checklist form (found on visitaec.org/covid19), which will assist the pastor in effectively planning around the safety of their members as they explore creative ways to worship in an outdoor setting. Pastors must submit a plan on the execution of a safe drive-in service and send to AEC ministerial director at gdonaldson@aecsda.com. Approval from AEC Administration must be obtained before services can be held.

- **Funeral Services:** Administration is allowing for the opening of our churches for "emergency compassionate use" for funeral services. This will allow our churches an opportunity to minister to those who are hurting and dealing with grief and loss. Pastors have received guidelines and must submit their requests to the ministerial director, Gene Donaldson for consideration. Administrative approval must be granted before conducting such services.

**Indemnification Agreement/Disclaimer**

We have been advised by our general counsel that any AEC church that rents its facility out to other congregations should not act in such a way to breach the contract signed with tenants. Therefore, congregations that rent AEC church facilities should be allowed to use the building for worship activities, if they choose, as long as it complies with local and state laws. Also, it is recommended that the attached indemnification agreement be signed by tenants prior to the use of the church facility.
Congregational Exposure

- In the case that you or someone in your congregation contracts the virus, please notify AEC’s Risk Manager, Chauna-Kaye Pottinger (ckpottinger@aecdsa.com).
- Please do not share the individual’s name.

Church Maintenance
Pastors are asked to ensure that a designee visits the church building at least once a week and conducts routine maintenance checks. Buildings left vacant and unmonitored may not be covered for vandalism and water damage under our insurance policy.

Youth Ministries
A code of conduct for virtual meeting guidelines has been developed by the Vice President for Administration’s office, Youth Department, and Risk Management.

Community Service
In our desire to protect the constituents of AEC, the administration of AEC called for the closing of our houses of worship for services and other large gatherings (including more than 10 persons). This decision is not intended to cease all ministry by church members. Many of our churches provide essential, life-preserving functions for the community, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable. These services include food pantries and soup kitchens. Therefore, AEC administration encourages these ministries to continue, as long as, volunteers understand their risks, meet in work groups of less than 10, and practice safe social distancing both in preparation for ministry, as well as serving. This includes using personal protective equipment (gloves and masks) and adhering to all local and state guidelines. Where possible, we ask that you obtain written permission from state and/or local authorities to perform said functions.

Soup kitchens are no longer allowed to serve food from inside the church building. All meals should be prepackaged and made available for pick-up outside in a secure location.

OPERATION MASK 2020
AEC set a goal to distribute at least 2020 masks in the community. We know many of our members/churches are making masks and donating them to others. We are asking that you would report your distribution on our conference website at visitaec.org/mask.
DONATION FOR FOOD PANTRIES
All donations to food pantries should be processed through the local church.

GENERAL DISASTER RELIEF VOLUNTEER DATABASE
If you would like to become a part of the disaster relief database, please complete the volunteer form found on the website at visitaec.org/acs. We are encouraging our young people to become engaged as volunteers.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS
During the COVID-19 crisis, community service volunteers under the age of 18, must be accompanied by their parent or guardian.

Personal Ministries
We also want to clarify our position on the personal ministry of our constituents during this time. Right now, is a great opportunity to show the love of Christ to our neighbors, fellow believers, seniors, and those who live alone. We can continue to practice social distancing while still engage others by:

• Calling
• Texting
• Emailing
• Video chatting
• Porch deliveries of groceries or supplies

Although we are worshiping corporately through other means (telephone, social media, live streaming, etc.), we are still called to minister as Jesus says in Matthew 25:35-36. We not only have a responsibility to minister in these very personal ways, but this time of COVID-19 represents a tremendous opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Door Knob Ministries
The publishing department is spearheading a literature distribution project that is delivering “hope” to people’s doorstep. If you are interested, please reach out to Reginald Alexander, Associate Publishing Director at ralexander@aecdsa.com for more details. Those participating must follow social distancing and other COVID safety measures such as:

• Wear gloves and mask
• Abstain from group and individual conversations.
• Refrain from handshaking, fist bumps, or hugs
• Social distance at least 6 feet apart in the neighborhood
• Keep face-to-face interaction to a minimum

Alternate Giving
• Remember to encourage online giving during this time.
  o If your church is not yet set up for AdventistGiving, please go to AEC’s website at visitaec.org/treasury to download and complete the application.
  o In the interim, you may direct churches to make donations to the Allegheny East Conference Church on the AdventistGiving website. This can also be accessed from AEC’s website under the “Give” tab.
• If there are those uncomfortable with online giving, they should contact their local treasurer to explore other options.

Education
• AEC K-12 Schools will open virtually on August 24th.
• Five of our K-12 schools (Calvary, Ephesus, Hillside, JRW, and Sharon Temple) will come together to form AEC School Consortium. Contact your local school for enrollment details.

**Call to Action** Distance Learning Technology Needs
The Office of Education is raising funds and accepting donations of technology to support students engaged in distance learning, as well as prepare for long-term distance learning equipment needed for teachers and future students. The goal is to raise $75,000. Over $7,000 has been collected so far. Thank you to all of our donors.

If you are willing to donate a computer or Chromebook, please contact the Office of Education, John Alberty at jalberty@aecsda.com, or Jodi-Ann Kelly at jkelly@aecsda.com. If you would like to donate funds, please do so on our website at visitaec.org/give. Indicate the amount on the “Christian Education” line of the electronic envelope.

Pine Forge Academy
• PFA will open its campus to students on August 24th. Faculty, staff and students will follow COVID safety protocols outlined in their reopening guidelines. More information can be found at www.pineforgeacademy.org.

Conference Office
• From now until further notice, AEC office staff will continue telecommuting.
• A rolling schedule will be used for office staff who need to visit the office.
• Employees are primarily communicating through phone and email.
Conference Events

- All conference-sponsored activities and events have been suspended for the remainder of year.

International and Domestic Travel

- All school and church-sponsored international trips are to be cancelled until further notice.
- International travel for all employees is restricted.
- Use of public transportation such as planes, buses, and ride-share are discouraged during this time.
- If travel is absolutely necessary to an area in which there is a known outbreak, prior approval must be obtained from Administration to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- If you have travelled outside of the country or to areas with reported cases, you should self-quarantine for 2 weeks upon your return.

Communication Protocol

The pastor of each congregation is the primary source for communicating information to members. Pastors are asked to check their “aecsda.com” email account daily for administrative updates.

Guidelines and reopening resources can be found and downloaded on AEC’s COVID page [www.visitaec.org/covid19](http://www.visitaec.org/covid19)

Learning Management System: [www.aecreopening.com](http://www.aecreopening.com)

Each church should appoint a safety officer (or designee) and a communication person to monitor the local news in the respective areas and update the church’s website and social media pages with pertinent information.

In addition to the specific measures listed above, please do not neglect to be diligent in prayer. President Fordham is asking that we commit to 1 minute of conference-wide prayer every day at 12 noon, as well to pray at least three times each day.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” -Philippians 4:6