



Jamaica Methodist District

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BULLETIN #8

To: All Clergy & Lay Leaders of the Church
From: Bishop the Rev'd Christine Gooden-Benguiche
President Jamaica District
Date: March 25, 2020
Subject: **GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP, BIBLE STUDY, PRAYERS AND OVERALL
MINISTRY ARRANGEMENTS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 IN JAMAICA**

The Jamaica Methodist District is cognisant that the Government of Jamaica has declared the island of Jamaica as a Disaster Area, in addition to effecting Enforcement Measures, in keeping with The Disaster Risk Management Act, 2015. **The most recent Order stipulates several restrictions which will further challenge our usual operations. These include, but are not limited to:**

- 1. Public gatherings in excess of ten (10) persons is prohibited, for the next 14 days, effective March 25, 2020. Where 10 persons have necessary reason(s) to gather, a distance of at least three (3) feet from each other is to be maintained.**
- 2. All citizens who are aged 75 years or older, are required to stay at their place of residence (i.e. at home), except that person may leave once per day, for food, medicine or other necessities of life.**
- 3. Every educational institution, as per the Education Act, 1980, shall remain closed until the 19th of April (i.e. the end of the Easter Term).**

Consequent on the foregoing, we have established a **District COVID-19 Response Team**, comprising members with expertise in areas of health care, disaster management, education, communication, and the clergy. The details of the composition of this team was circulated last week, and **we remind all ministers and Circuit Stewarts to urgently ensure the establishment of a Circuit COVID-19 Response Team** to facilitate the replication of District-efforts, as well as initiatives unique to your locale, to ensure that the work of God continues, notwithstanding the present challenges.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

Given the restrictions, and a holistic view of the current and increasing gravity of this global pandemic, we are proposing that the following items form part of the sustenance of the work of God among the people, in the weeks ahead, until we are further guided:

1) DIVINE WORSHIP SERVICES:

- 1. That All chapels will be closed for public worship for the next three Sundays beginning Sunday March 29, 2020; please note that this include Easter Sunday April 12,2020 until further notice.**
 - i) That we discourage public gathering for worship, notwithstanding the provisions for a maximum of ten (10) persons; this, as controlling this may prove difficult in**

many instances, and the practice of 'social distancing' and related health risks from such gatherings may result in further spreading of the virus.

- ii) The District shall facilitate a **weekly service inclusive of Palm Sunday Good Friday and Easter Sunday, to be streamed live** on various platforms, to include one or a combination of, but not limited to YouTube, Social Media Lives – Instagram, Facebook, websites and others, based on feasibility. These services will also be recorded for future reference where persons are unable to join live. Lenten meditations will be shared during Holy Week as an option to what Circuits will do locally.
- iii) The Providence Congregation in the Providence Circuit has agreed to make available their website and social media platforms for **supporting the live streaming across** the Conference.
- iv) All Circuit Ministers are to collaborate with their colleagues, Lay pastors, Preachers and Class Leaders in their Circuits, supported by the Circuit and Congregational Stewards, to **prepare/collate weekly material to be disseminated among their members** via electronic means and in hard copy where internet access is limited (especially in rural communities as well as primarily for the elderly members);
- v) **All members are encouraged to engage in private family worship sessions**, via joining the available online platforms and/or via the use of the material provided through their Circuit ministers/lay leaders.
- vi) All ministers are to engage their various leaders to assist with the **creation or validating (where it already exists) of a complete contact list of members and adherents**, to include full names, aliases, phone numbers, email addresses and the names and contact numbers for their next of kin. This should be used to aid in maintaining contact with all our fold.
- vii) **Posters/Notices** are to be placed prominently on all chapel doors, to direct members to the guide to worship and related matters, where for some reason, they show up and see the doors closed. This should always include the social media platforms.

2) PRAYER AND COUNSELLING SUPPORT: During and after this pandemic, many individuals may experience anxiety, distress, and other issues which will require prayer and counselling support, in order to heal from the present realities. In responding, we propose that:

- i) All ministers are to create a list of members in their congregations who have the requisite training and expertise to provide support in this regard. Ministers should also avail themselves in this regard. The list with all necessary contact details and an indication of available times shall be submitted to the District Secretary for a master list to be generated and shared among clergy and lay leaders so when persons express such needs, we may be able to connect them with the appropriate personnel to provide response in the midst of this crisis. **An indication should be made on the list being submitted, as to whether persons are available to others outside of their Circuit, as may be deemed necessary.** Of note, all counselling support must be provided via the phone or other medium, until the social distancing guidelines have been lifted.

- ii) The District Office will be exploring the establishment of a dedicated hotline to facilitate prayer and counselling support, in conjunction with the volunteers submitted by Circuits, as may be feasible.
- iii) Class Leaders and Assistant Leaders should be engaged in this regard, to provide support in either praying with/for or counselling (as able) and facilitating persons requiring connection to this support network. Where classes are not functioning this will be a good time to resuscitate or establish these groups.

3) VISITATION OF THE SICK AND SHUT-IN:

- i) **Out of an abundance of caution, we strongly discourage visitations currently.** We propose that ministers and lay leaders/member who usually minister in this area, contact the sick and shut-in members via phone directly or through their families, and offer the support virtually. In doing same, we should also use the opportunity to help them to appreciate the current realities and the rationale behind this form of engagement, until we have returned to some degree of normalcy. Please note that members without a support system should be contacted and meals, medication and groceries be provided.

4) EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS:

- i) Ministers, School Board Chairpersons and Members, as well as Methodist Teachers in all Circuits are to collaborate in supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI) and the other relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government and private sector partners, to response to the needs of our students and teachers. We should endeavour to forge partnerships to ensure that none of our students are left behind or out of accessing what is being made available.
- ii) Support should be given to increasing the availability of and access to the materials being supplied, to ensure that teaching and learning continues;
- iii) Ministers and Lay Leaders should seek to create a directory of teachers (current and retired) who may make themselves available to students who may require support, where families may not possess the capacity to facilitate the appropriate 'home-schooling' that this crisis has forced us to embrace.
- iv) Where congregations or congregants usually offer financial support to students for school, we are to encourage the continuation as far as is possible, without breaching the stipulations of the government.

5) FINANCIES: TITHES AND OFFERING

- i) All Circuits are to make available to their members, details of bank accounts, to which tithes and offering may be transferred online or lodged at the bank, and an appropriate mechanism be implemented to monitor the movement of the funds.
- ii) Appeals are to be made to the members to support the payment of current expenses, where congregations and Circuits may not be in a financial position to do so, during the upcoming weeks and likely months.

6) SUNDAY SCHOOL

Circuits are encouraged to use Virtual meetings among Sunday school teachers, and church school groups to plan goals, strategies and then content (weekly) for our children to increase their spiritual growth. The Newsletter from the Safe-Guarding Office (February/March Issue) and Prayer charts from the District should be used among other resources in this regard.

7) GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. **Church groups, to include, but not limited to Classes, Youth/Young Adult Fellowships, Women's Leagues and Men's Fellowship** may virtually engage in worship, Bible Study and Prayer Meetings.
2. Ministers should prepare Bible Study Material and disseminate to their members, for use during this time. These are to also be submitted to the District President and Secretary for addition to a collection which may be shared with others as become necessary.
3. **Family Worship is strongly encouraged.** Material should be developed and disseminated by the Minister(s) to congregants to aid in this style of worship. Members of the clergy may collaborate in developing and sharing content for use in this regard.
4. **Assigned Preachers** should be engaged to create reflective notes which may be disseminated to the congregants to be used for family worship on Sunday Morning, or otherwise.
5. **Use of Modern Technology for Worship:** Churches that have the technological means to do so, may apply the following:
 - a. **Assigned preachers may record the sermons and teach-ins/Bible studies ahead of time and recordings** be disseminated to church members, so that it can be listened during their time of private, family or class/group worship, study and prayer.
 - b. **Approved church websites and social media pages** may be used to **live stream services.** Alternately, recordings of services and/or sermons may be posted for use by members and the wider public, to access the spoken word of God. We encourage Circuits to submit these to our Communications and Information Commission, to facilitate sharing via our District social media platforms.
 - c. **WhatsApp Groups** may be created, or where they already exist, be used for Worship, Bible Study and Prayer. The Conference Call option may be used to enhance the sense of togetherness in this regard, where good internet connection allows same. **Zoom, Skype** and other platforms may also be used.
 - d. **Circuit/Congregational Bible Study Sessions & Prayer Meetings:** The Bible Study material should be sent ahead of time to congregants, classes or church groups and they may decide which day is preferred for them.

The Methodist Church was founded upon the 'Class System', where members would meet in homes of congregants for small group worship and fellowship. With the new restrictions, the gathering is prohibited, but the mechanism of connecting with each other is most relevant. The Church today should not seek to cease existing during times of crises, and such, we are urged to draw upon our already built in class system to continue to fellowship (virtually) and give support to each other during this period, in keeping with the provisions of the laws of the land.

Be mindful that the above list of guidelines is non-exhaustive, and other appropriate measures may be implemented as deemed feasible within your context.

It must be emphasized that **social distancing** is of the utmost importance during this time, if churches/groups are gathering for pre-recording or facilitating live streams. The usual handshakes and hugging as means of greeting are strongly discouraged, during this period.

Please ensure that the necessary health precautions are observed, to include, but not limited to proper and regular washing hands, avoiding direct contact by sitting/standing at least 3-6 feet from others, resisting the urge to touch the face – especially eyes, mouth and nose, and all other recommended preventative measures being recommended by the health authorities.

We also reiterate that those members/adherents who are regarded by the health authorities as being at greater risk, to exercise great care in personal protection, and limit their use of public spaces and general interactions. This includes the elderly and those with existing respiratory illnesses/conditions. The younger ones among us must also take note, that they are not excluded from the exposure and likelihood of contracting the virus, and are therefore urged to follow the guidance being given by the authorities.

Continue to engage in prayer for our nation and the world, in keeping with our ongoing **14 Days of Prayer** Schedule. We are confident that God continues to bring healing and restoration to our land, so we press on in faith, hope and wisdom, as the Holy Spirit guides us!

I encourage us to exercise our faith in God and not to be overcome by fear; God is the same yesterday, today and forever. As he spoke peace to the winds and wave, he speaks to us now in the crisis of COVID-19 and He will see us through. Let us continue to be encouraged as we read God's word, and intercede.

#StaySafe #Prepare #DoNotFear #14DaysofPrayer #COVID19Jamaica #Stayonyourknees

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