

Policy and Best Practices for Diocesan Outreach Services during COVID-19



As of March 24, 2020, the provincial government has ordered the shutdown of all “non-essential” services. Services that are deemed essential include “organizations that support the provision of food, shelter, safety or protection, and/or social services and other necessities of life to economically disadvantaged and other vulnerable individuals, including but not limited to food banks, violence against women emergency shelters, homeless shelters, community housing, supportive housing, children’s aid societies, residential services for adults with developmental disabilities and for children, and custody and detention programs for young persons in conflict with the law.”

Many of our parishes have programs that “support the provision of food, shelter... and other necessities of life to economically disadvantaged and other vulnerable individuals.” In most cases these programs are delivered by volunteers, perhaps with one or two staff. To the extent that these programs can be adapted to continue with protective measures to reduce the risk of contagion, **and** have sufficient resources and personnel to continue operations, we encourage parishes to continue to offer these essential services. **Those who themselves are at high risk of serious complications from COVID-19, due to age or underlying medical condition, or who live with individuals at high risk, should not put themselves at increased risk. This is especially true in the case of volunteers.**

Parishes should be mindful of the precautions around social distancing and reducing the risk of viral transmission. Here are some best practices to follow.

- Insofar as possible, adjust your program to minimize the risk of contagion (i.e. instead of offering a sit-down community meal, offer meals “to-go” to be handed out to guests; pre-package food bank hampers by family size)
- Limit the number of people present in one location to a maximum of 5 at any time if possible (as these are essential services, more than 5 people may be gathered if needed), ensuring 2 metres distance between staff, volunteers and guests, as well as frequent handwashing and disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces. If possible, wear **gloves** when interacting with program guests; add **masks** if your guests and/or services put you at higher risk (more direct contact with guests; guests are homeless or otherwise exposed to the virus)
- Staff and volunteers are all responsible to self-screen and avoid coming in if they have been recommended to self-isolate or seek medical attention. A self-assessment tool can be found at www.covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment

- One staff or volunteer (wearing a mask) should stand near the door with hand sanitizer to apply sanitizer to each person entering the facility. This can be done without touching the people. Only this person should handle the hand sanitizer bottle.
- Guests should be screened before entering the facility. The following tools from the City of Toronto may be helpful.
 - [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Homelessness Service Settings](#)
 - [Participant Referral Flow Chart](#)
- To minimize possible spread of the virus and/or disruptions in service, divide volunteers into two teams so that if one team must self-isolate the other can continue. Have “back-up” personnel available in case staff or volunteers must stay home on short notice.
- Continue to follow all directives from the provincial and local health authorities.

In some cases, parishes have been approached by municipal bodies or non-profit organizations who wish to use their space for delivery of essential social service programs. All such requests should be forwarded to Wendy Pearson in Property Resources at wpearson@toronto.anglican.ca for approval.

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