



For Congregations In Between Pastors During the Time of Coronavirus

Some helpful things to consider if you do not have a called/settled pastor.

1. Is someone monitoring the church phone? If so, do you have a procedure for what to do with requests for emergency aid or emergency pastoral care?
2. Who is the local agency to which your caller might be referred? Have phone numbers of these agencies handy, to give to any callers. If the congregation used to give our gift cards to local gas stations or stores, is someone willing to still distribute these, and/or to buy new ones if they are handed out?
3. Who is checking the church mail? Even if the church office is closed, financial checks and balances must be followed and checks should be cashed and deposits made in a timely manner.
4. Who is the local pastor responsible for your congregation's pastoral care? Even though visits may not be made, that pastor can make a phone call to the person or family concerned. How is this pastor being compensated for his/her time and services?
5. If your congregation has a Prayer Team, is the chairperson of that group willing to organize a few people who might call the person/family who has called the church with a particular need to have a prayer over the phone? Callers might want to think up a prayer and write it down, pray extemporaneously, or ask if the person would like to pray the Lord's Prayer with the caller. If the team knows of someone who has been on the list in the past, they might divide up the list to call these people to have a prayer and check-in conversation. If the person in need asks for something that cannot be done/given, it is OK to say, "no" and to refer them to a local agency for help.
6. Is there a lay visitors team? Is the chairperson able to organize the team to phone the congregation's homebound members to check in? If so, ask callers to think about what they are willing and able to do, and to know, if they cannot do something (pick up groceries or medicine) if there is a service in the area that might do this. It is OK to say, "no" to a request.
7. What is happening to food pantry items when the church is closed? Should they be taken to an agency who is open, in order that they might be distributed before items expire? Who might do this (being sure to arrange with the agency how to drop off items)?
8. Is someone monitoring the church's email and website? Sometimes people leave messages through the church's webpage or Facebook page which need to be answered. Be careful of people posting "helpful advice" which might not be accurate. The administrator needs to feel authorized to re-post the group guidelines or remove inappropriate messages.
9. Is there a link to the UCC daily devotional on your webpage or Facebook page, or both? At a time of difficulty, people could use a word of encouragement. Is there someone in the congregation who would enjoy writing an occasional prayer, poem or reflection to be shared? Please remind writers that they must use their own materials, so that copyright law is not broken. The person who is monitoring the Facebook page, or the Consistory president, might want to monitor these submissions for appropriate content. How else might you use your media in a way that continues to engage and encourage people, even without a pastor to post a sermon or devotion? Would a call for photos be appropriate (places that make me feel closer to God, remembering events at church, my personal prayer space, etc.)?
10. What about college students and deployed military personnel? Is there a way to connect with them during this time?
11. Perhaps this list jogged your creative juices and you have some new ideas. Pray for God's blessing on them, run them by someone else, then see how they might be actualized during this unique time.