



OCBC's Developing Protocols for Community Practice & Care in Response to COVID-19/Coronavirus

OCBC leadership is attending carefully to the practices of care that we need to take in order to be faithfully and ethically responsive to the COVID-19 global health emergency. Additionally, the ministers of the Harvard Square churches are in close contact about developing a fairly unified set of practices that take the developing situation of COVID-19 in Massachusetts seriously and with enough precaution, while also thinking through ways of cultivating community amid the disruption of our usual gatherings. Gov. Baker has declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts following the precipitous rise in cases of COVID-19 here. Harvard and MIT are both suspending in-person classes and moving to online formats for the remainder of the semester, as students will not be allowed to return to the campuses after spring break. Numerous organizations in the city are cancelling any in-person meetings over 10 people, and recommending virtual options for as many small gatherings as possible.

At this point, with risk of infection still fairly low but growing, these measures are an attempt at social responsibility – an act of care for the wider community to which we belong. By taking precautions not to spread the virus, we are helping to ensure that hospitals are not stretched to capacity and those who need the most care can receive it. [Reports](#) suggest that on average, every infected person is infecting two more people, often before even knowing that they are infected. What we do in response to COVID-19 now will have long-term implications for the trajectory of the virus in the weeks to come. And how we practice community as a congregation now will have implications for the lives of OCBCers in many and varied ways. With these ethics of care and social responsibility at heart, these are the emerging plans for Old Cambridge Baptist Church.

From Thursday, March 12 until Palm Sunday, April 5:

On Sunday, March 15, we will hold an in-person worship service that will be the final in-person gathering in the OCBC building for at least the next three weeks, at which time we will reassess the developing public health situation. At this service, seating will be at greater distancing and no refreshments will be served at coffee hour. Children will stay with parents during worship, and no Forum/meal will be held afterwards. All cleaning protocols previously developed will be followed as outlined in previous communications. We encourage parishioners with health concerns or people over 60 years of age who are uncomfortable with gathering in groups to stay home if you feel the need to do so. We will live stream the service in a way we hope will be accessible to those at home, most likely via the OCBC Facebook page this week.

- 1) From March 22 to April 5, a simple worship offering will be streamed online in a format that we hope will be accessible to many OCBCers. The congregation will not gather for these worship services. Only the worship leaders will be present in the building to conduct the services. [Manudy Thursday service will not take place in the Sanctuary, but we may announce an outdoor gathering for that sacred occasion. Stay tuned.]

- 2) Forums and meals after Service will not be held during these weeks.
- 3) Thursday evening discussions will be suspended immediately and replaced with invitations for discussion and engagement in online formats.
- 4) All OCBC meetings after March 15 should be held virtually using [conference call or video conferencing technology](#), or simply by communicating via e-mail. We encourage you to keep up good communication among Teams and Committees, as this network of leadership will be vital in the coming days.
- 5) A network of caring companionship will be developed to put people into clusters of small groups within the congregation that can check in on each other regularly, communicating via telephone, text, e-mail, or even on walks together outdoors as able. We hope this will be a unique opportunity to build strong bonds with a smaller group of folks at OCBC that may have long-lasting positive impact on the community.
- 6) One-on-one pastoral care will continue to be provided by Rev. Sanders as needed, and you should feel free to [reach out to him](#) as you have needs arise.
- 7) As the weather is getting nicer and days are growing longer, we will consider ways of gathering outdoors for walks and the cultivation of our relationship with the more-than-human world.

Considerations for the near future:

- A) Monitoring the trajectory of the virus in Massachusetts, we will need to consider possibilities for future services and gatherings on Easter and beyond.
- B) Should OCBCers who are self-isolated in their homes because of underlying health concerns or age come to have material needs that need to be met, OCBC's network of caregivers will be drawn upon as much as possible for things like grocery runs and other similar needs. Please [alert Rev. Sanders](#) to any needs as they arise.

Helpful Resources:

[10 Guidelines for Pastoral Care During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#) by Baptist minister and pastoral theologian, Eileen Campbell-Reed, Union Theological Seminary (*The Christian Century*, March 10, 2020)

[Can Lent Help Prepare Us for a Pandemic?](#) by L. Roger Owens (*The Christian Century*)

[A Concise Coronavirus Guide for Churches](#) (*Christianity Today*)

[Briefing Note on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak Version 1.0](#) (Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings)

[Covid-19, your community, and you – a data science perspective.](#) by Jeremy Howard and Rachel Thomas (fast.ai)

[Cancel Everything.](#) by Yascha Mounk (*The Atlantic*)