

Good Morning,

As people of faith, we are called to be prepared to respond to the needs of hurting people and to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crisis. In light of the current flu outbreak and warnings from the Center for Disease Control and World Health Organization, the Shenandoah Presbytery Disaster Response Team (DRT) met on Friday and made the following recommendations.

We've heard lots of personal precautions in the news:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Stay home if you or members of your family are sick.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Have a two-week supply of food, water, and medications in your home. (This is, of course, a standard preparation for all disasters and a good one to maintain.)

The DRT has reviewed many of the resources that are available online, culled the most relevant, and posted them on the Shenandoah Presbytery website. You can find checklists for families and help for making disaster plans. We urge you to look at those resources and make your own personal family plan for this potential crisis and any future event.

But there is more we need to do as congregations. Governments are already closing schools. As the outbreak progresses, churches may be among those asked to suspend public gatherings, such as worship. The time to plan for that contingency is NOW.

At the very least:

- Develop a plan to communicate information about changes to programs and schedules
- Evaluate the church's usual activities and services including worship and communion to determine how those activities may need to be modified.
- Review staffing policies:
 - Staff absences during illness or closures
 - Mandatory sick-leave
 - Flexible work hours and working from home
- Determine how to contact and potentially care for our most vulnerable people
 - Those who are elderly and living at home without nearby family resources
 - Single parent families with young children
 - People with disabilities and underlying medical conditions who are without local support systems.

The Disaster page of the Presbytery Website also has planning information for churches. Check out those resources as we begin the planning process. In this kind of planning, all groups need a passionate advocate to step up and keep folks on track until this task of planning is complete. We are looking for that passionate advocate and others to step up NOW and help us begin this process. Please talk with the pastor if you are called to respond to helping your congregation to witness to the healing love of Christ in a time of need in your community.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."