



UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Best Practices for Funerals During Social Distancing *as of 8.31.2020*

Recent Updates from the New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association:

6/16/2020:

As New Jersey moves into *Phase Two* of its COVID-19 response, rules regarding funeral services are being relaxed. Funeral homes can now allow up to 50 people inside, with the following restrictions:

- Only one service is allowed in the funeral home at a time
- Masks or face coverings must be worn by employees, family members and visitors at all times
- A six-foot distance must be maintained between groups of people from the same household

Pastoral Care

- Prioritize face-to-face meetings for absolutely necessary pastoral reasons only; delegate all logistical conversations to phone calls, emails, or video calls. Offer and encourage virtual visits.
- Maintain social distancing guidelines during face-to-face meetings (maintain a distance of at least six feet if possible, refrain from handshaking, hugs, etc.)
- Encourage loved ones to designate one person in the family to interface with the funeral director and/or clergy whenever possible
- Make sure the meeting place is clean and well-ventilated with adequate handwashing supplies. Distribute individual packets of tissues rather than passing around a shared box.
- Act as a non-anxious presence to loved ones, offering pastoral care and guidance, and calmly explain the options available for the safest ways to remember, grieve, and celebrate the lives of their loved ones in the current circumstances
- Encourage the family to start thinking about what they would like in the future memorial service; collecting memories and mementos can be a helpful part of the grieving process.
- Continue to follow up with families via phone, email, and when the COVID-19 crisis has passed, in person
- When dealing with multiple deaths simultaneously, clergy should avoid interfacing with multiple families in one day to prevent super-spreading. This can be done by sharing responsibilities with other staff or nearby clergy, limiting to one in-person meeting per day whenever possible, or by deferring to video communication.
- When using anointing oils or other supplies, take care not to cross-contaminate clean products (i.e., don't double dip)

Funeral and Memorial Services

In person

- Funeral homes can allow up to 50 people inside for a service at one time as long as there is only one service at a time, masks or face coverings are worn by all in attendance, and a six-foot distance is maintained between groups of people from the same household
- In New Jersey, houses of worship may hold in-person services of up to 150 people or 25% of a room's capacity, whichever number is lower. All attendees at indoor gatherings must wear face coverings and stay six feet apart



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- Loved ones are being recommended to strongly consider cremation.
- Cremation allows loved ones to postpone a memorial service until such a time when all mourners may attend and/or to host a prayer service or memorial service online or via conference call. Everyone should call in or attend virtually from their own homes. Families may wish to have an online service now *and* an in-person memorial service at a later date.
- If the family chooses to have a viewing or service:
 - Encourage a small graveside service (in the case of burial) or at the crematory (in the case of cremation) to minimize the number of places the deceased as well as the immediate family need to be transported. Check in advance that the crematory or cemetery will permit such a service.
 - Thoroughly clean and sanitize any rooms that will be used prior to the service.
 - Encourage them to maintain distance from one another.
 - Avoid passing of the peace or any other greetings through physical touch
 - Post clear signage in your church about healthy habits, such as “How to Stop The Spread of Germs,” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>
 - Keep soap dispensers filled in restrooms. The CDC has several informational flyers on handwashing you can post in public and staff restrooms.
 - Have alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol on hand
 - Have extra tissues on hand (single packs, not boxes).
 - Mourners should not lay hands on, touch, or kiss the body; assume that everybody is a carrier for COVID-19 even when it was not the cause of death.
 - Do not assume you know the cause of death; assume that everybody is a carrier for COVID-19. At this time, it seems unlikely to transmit the virus from the deceased to a person, but it is not impossible.
 - Mourners should wash their hands after to viewing the body.
 - In the case of burial, those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etc., should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water after removal of the gloves once the burial is complete.
 - People with respiratory symptoms should not participate in the viewing or at least wear a medical mask to prevent contamination of the place and further transmission of the disease to others.
 - Observe strict physical distancing (at least 6 feet between people) during any viewing.
 - Avoid using condolence books (see below ideas for condolences)
 - Thoroughly clean and sanitize all rooms used after the service.

Livestreaming/Online

For funeral directors:

- NFDA (National Funeral Directors Association) webcasting license allows performance of ASCAP, BMI and SESAC copyrighted music on Facebook and YouTube as would occur during funeral services.
- If you do not currently have a NFDA funeral webcasting license, more information can be found here: www.nfda.org/resources/compliance-legal/music-and-webcasting-licenses



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- Please note: In some cases, Facebook or YouTube may take videos down or stop a live stream because they are unaware the funeral home has the appropriate webcasting license and is permitted to stream funeral services with copyrighted music.
- If you hold a webcasting license and find your streams or videos are being blocked or taken down, please take a photo or capture a screenshot of the notification you receive stating your videos or live feeds are being blocked/taken down. Send this photo or screen shot to NFDA (nfda@nfda.org) and the issue will be directly addressed with Facebook and/or YouTube.
- NFDA offers sample legal forms that give authorization for funeral homes to webcast funeral services and direction to record funeral services

For church leaders

- For more information on online services, including livestreaming, go to
 - <https://www.gnjumc.org/worship/online-worship-and-services/>
- Encourage the family to start thinking about what they would like in the future memorial service; collecting memories and mementos can be a helpful part of the grieving process.
- Obtain written permission from the family giving authorization for the church to livestream the service and direction to record the service
- Follow their wishes to password protect, privately link, or otherwise restrict access to services. Not everyone wants their grief broadcast in front of the world. This is particularly important when children and youth are involved.
- With the family's permission, record and share the live-streamed event (not all live-streaming automatically records!) so that ill or quarantined mourners and their caregivers can watch it later when they are available.

Remembering Lost Loved Ones and Connecting

- Consider offering those making the arrangements to provide the church phone number and/or email address to other mourners for sharing condolences. Pass any condolences received onto the loved ones.
- Avoid using condolence books
- Consider holding a "sympathy card shower" for the family by having friends and others send sympathy cards to the family or to the church, to be delivered/picked up by the family. Make sure congregants have the correct address (physical and email) for the family.
- Make a virtual receiving line by encouraging people to send videos to the family.
- Encourage people to send groceries and homemade meals* to the family but leave them on the doorstep and text/ring the bell. (*As of 3/16/20 there is no evidence COVID-19 can be spread through food).

Mourning Someone Lost to COVID-19

- The CDC has deemed it is safe to cremate those who are infected with COVID-19.
- Though there is no known risk associated with being in the same room with the body of a person who has died from COVID-19, mourners should not lay hands on, touch, or kiss the body of someone who has died of COVID-19, before, during, or after the body has been prepared.



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- In the case of burial, those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etc., should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water after removal of the gloves once the burial is complete.
- People with respiratory symptoms should not participate in the viewing or at least wear a medical mask to prevent contamination of the place and further transmission of the disease to others.
- Observe strict physical distancing (at least 6 feet between people) during the viewing.
- Mourners should wash hands after viewing the body.
- If washing the body or shrouding are important religious or cultural practices, families are encouraged to work with their community cultural and religious leaders and funeral home staff on how to reduce their exposure as much as possible.
- At a minimum, people conducting these activities should wear disposable gloves. If splashing of fluids is expected, additional personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required (such as disposable gown, faceshield or goggles and facemask).
- After removal of PPE, perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. Soap and water should be used if the hands are visibly soiled.

Special Note

Regardless of the cause of death:

- Final disposition is strongly encouraged to be immediate cremation, direct burial, or entombment.
 - There are to be **NO** in-person, open-casket viewings, visitations or ceremonies conducted.
 - Under no circumstances are more than 10 people to gather for any decedent.
 - Ten and under is inclusive of family, funeral home staff, clergy, cemetery/crematory personnel.
- Embalming (without aspiration) remains an option but is strongly discouraged at this time.
- Decedents **CANNOT** be stored or held for future memorialization.
- Funeral homes may not refuse a death due to a lack of capacity. Rather every mortuary must make arrangements with colleagues in other counties to which every family not being serviced must be referred.

SOURCES

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<https://www.nfda.org/covid-19>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/coronavirus-funerals-to-be-held-under-controlled-conditions-1.4202127>

https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1jp2i6bFvSTfLbDf0nu5QWskI3aF_toK_uN1o0yvujEA/mobilebasic

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