COVID-19 Health Disparity Tool Kit

**What is a health care disparity?**

Based on *the* *National Stakeholder Strategy, Healthy People 2020 and Health and Human Services (HHS)* *Plan 2011,* “[a] health disparity is a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and / or environmental disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial and/or ethnic group; religion; socioeconomic status; gender; age; mental health; cognitive, sensory, or physical disability; sexual orientation or gender identity; geographic location; or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.” For more information see: [Healthy New Jersey 2020 Health Disparities](https://www.state.nj.us/health/chs/hnj2020/about/foundation/healthdisparities.shtml). The COVID-19 pandemic has bought great exposure to existing health disparities based on race. This is becoming more complex as race intersect with other factors such as, economic status, gender, age, living conditions, access to health care and so forth. Each intersection places people in a more precarious position.

**What we are called to do**

Throughout scripture, God goes to extraordinary measures to care for God’s people. God frees the Israelites from slavery. God sustains the Israelites in exile. God enters into human life in Jesus of Nazareth and raises him from the dead, all for the sake of the world! In the New Testament, Jesus calls those who follow him to participate in God’s extraordinary caring. The greatest commandments are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself,” (Matt. 26:36-39). This means making choices that take others into consideration, not just ourselves. Jesus models this by adapting to the changing needs of people in extraordinary ways and challenging others to do the same. Sometimes, caring for others as ourselves requires an interruption of our usual way of doing things. Sometimes it requires going beyond what we are used to.

As Christians and United Methodists of Greater New Jersey, we are called and created to love our neighbor. In the midst of COVID-19, this love is needed more than ever. The racial disparities in both the infection and death rate due to COVID-19 is alarming. Some United Methodist pastors and congregations are on the front lines and are addressing the impact of COVID -19 and racialized disparities daily. You may be a pastor who’s intimately experiencing this inequity personally or in life threatening ways with your congregations. You may be a major distribution center associated with the UMC during this time.

In an effort to address realities created by racial disparities in your community, we have created this toolkit resource for pastors to use with their congregations and community partners as you work collaboratively in communities that are suffering.

This toolkit provides resources for the following areas:

* Face Mask Distribution
* Food Security
* COVID-19 Health and Safety (in English, Spanish, and Korean)
* Rituals and Routines

Thank you for your leadership and ministry. God is working in and through you to eliminate suffering and illuminate God’s healing presence in the world.

**A special thank you to everyone who helped with the creation of this toolkit:**

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*The toolkit a living document available on the GNJ website and available to download/print. As new realities come to light, additional resources will be added.*

**Face Masks**

Churches can help stop the spread of COVID-19 by coordinating the distribution of facemasks in churches, food banks, diaper depots, homeless shelters and other community partners. Below you will find resources for how your church can help distribute facemasks safely as well as additional resources to share with those who receive them.

**CDC procedures for face masks**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has provided resources regarding how to effectively wear a face mask, how to remove a face mask safely, how to clean a facemask, and how to make a facemask at home (including videos).

* [View the CDC resources in English here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).
* [View the CDC resources in Spanish here](https://espanol.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).
* [View the CDC Resources in Korean here](https://korean.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).

These resources are also provided in a user friendly PDF format for easy sharing in your community. Consider sharing these resources, or information from them in the following ways:

* Post on church doors/windows for persons walking by
* List content on church signs on rotating basis
* Share on church website, social media, and newsletters
* Share with partners, such as food pantries and afterschool programs
* Ask to share at grocery stores in your area.

**Suggested “Face Mask Kit” Items to distribute**

* 2 face masks per person (made from new fabric)
* Mild detergent for washing face masks (machine or hand wash)
* Washing the mask in the washing machine is recommended [by the CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-coverings-information.pdf).)
* Instructions for how to use and clean the masks (see above links under “CDC procedures for face masks”)
* Piece of paper that says, *If in need of the following, please call 211 and you will be connected to experts who can assist:* 
  + Food assistance
  + Housing Assistance
  + Financial Assistance
  + Healthcare resources

**Best Practices for Receiving and Distributing Masks**

New Jersey has identified best practices for volunteers. These guidelines need to be followed when receiving and distributing face mask kits. View the NJ Volunteer Guidelines here: <https://www.nj.gov/state/assets/pdf/volunteer/2020-0325-nj-volunteer-guidance.pdf>

Face Mask Reception Ideas (All of these options require a mask reception coordinator)

* Place a drop off bin outside of the church in a covered area.
* Assign a volunteer to collect donations at a frequency that works best for your context.
* Create a “mask drive” for a specific time period and schedule a time for the drive host to drop off the donations or for a volunteer to pick up the donations
* Schedule a “drive through” date(s) and time(s) for donors to drop off donations
* Have donations mailed to your church
* Establish Drop Off Hours

Ideas for Distributing Face Masks

* Establish curbside or home delivery of masks through your church
* Set appointments for picking up masks from your church
* Partner with churches, food pantries, homeless shelters, diaper depots, and other organizations persons are visiting to have them distribute the masks to clients in need.

**Food Security**

There has been an increase in the need for food assistance due to outcomes created by COVID-19. Just as Jesus fed the 5000, GNJ can feed those in need in our communities. Find a list of active GNJ food pantries in your district in this toolkit. Find a list of additional food pantries in your area (by zip code) using the following food pantry locator tools:

* FoodPantries.org: <https://www.foodpantries.org/>
* Food Bank of South Jersey: <https://foodbanksj.org/zip-code-locator/>
* Fulfill Food Bank: <https://fulfillnj.org/get-help/locate-a-pantry/>
* Community Food Bank of New Jersey: <https://cfbnj.org/findfood/>

GNJ is actively working with food pantries and food banks across New Jersey to distribute meals to individuals and families in need. Be sure to visit the *Food and Food Pantries* page of the GNJ website for updates and additional resources.

**COVID-19 Resources**

We can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by sharing culturally sensitive and multi-lingual educational materials in our churches and neighborhoods.  Below you will find key resources from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in English, Spanish and Korean. Consider sharing these resources, or information from them in the following ways:

* Post on church doors/windows for persons walking by
* List content on church signs on rotating basis
* Share on church website, social media, and newsletters
* Share with partners, such as food pantries and afterschool programs
* Ask to share at grocery stores in your area.

**General Ways to Protect Yourself and Others**

Such protections include covering your cough/sneeze, wearing a face mask, social distancing, and washing your hands often, and cleaning/disinfecting surfaces.

[View the CDC overview in English here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html).

[View the CDC overview in Spanish here.](https://espanol.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html)

[View the CDC overview in Korean here](https://korean.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html).

**Face Mask Instructions**

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has provided resources regarding how to effectively wear a face mask, how to remove a face mask safely, how to clean a facemask, and how to make a facemask at home (including videos).

[View the CDC resources in English here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).

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[View the CDC Resources in Korean here](https://korean.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html).

These resources are also provided in a user friendly PDF format for easy sharing in your community.

**Social Distancing**

Social distancing is crucial in helping to avoid contracting COVID-19. As the CDC shares, “COVID-19 spreads, mainly among people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) for a prolonged period. Spread happens when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and droplets from their mouth or nose are launched into the air and land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. The droplets can also be inhaled into the lungs. Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely also play a role in the spread of COVID-19.”

[View the CDC Resource about Social Distancing in English here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html).

[View the CDC Resource about Social Distancing in Spanish here](https://espanol.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html).

[View the CDC Resource about Social Distancing in Korean here](https://korean.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html).

**Handwashing**

Regular handwashing is also crucial in helping to avoid contracting COVID-19. The CDC has provided resources, including videos and family activities, for when to wash your hands, how to best wash your hands to remove germs, and best practices for teaching hand washing to children.

[View the CDC Handwashing Resources in English here](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/).

[View the CDC Handwashing Resources in Spanish here.](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/esp/index.html)

**Emergency Hotlines**

Due to new realities created by COVID-19, there is an increased need for assistance in the areas of human services, mental and emotional health, abuse, hunger, and more. The New Jersey Department of Children and Families has created a document with toll free hotline/helpline information to connect persons in need of support with experts who can help. Consider sharing this document in the ways identified at the beginning of this section.

[View and download the hotline resource in English here.](https://www.nj.gov/dcf/news/Hotlines&Helplines-COVID.pdf)

**Additional Multicultural Resources**

[View Equality Labs – A Community Health Guide to Understanding the Coronavirus here](https://www.equalitylabs.org/covid19guide)

**Routines and Rituals**

Gathering in community to worship and fellowship is central to Christian life and practice. However, there are times when we are called to change our usual way of doing things to better care for one another and for the world. When Jesus’ disciples were hungry on the Sabbath, they plucked some grain to eat. Jesus could have enforced “worship as usual” on the Sabbath. He could have said if the disciples simply had enough faith and went to synagogue, they would no longer be hungry. When the rich man asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life, Jesus responded that first he had to give up his wealth for the poor and follow Jesus. The man had done everything right, kept all the commandments, but had not loved the poor as himself. In both examples, Jesus honors and respects the routines and rules of the faith (Sabbath, the commandments). But in both examples, he prioritizes extraordinary, literally “out of the ordinary” care for people, especially those in need. This doesn’t mean disregarding routines and rules but sometimes does mean going *beyond* them, in new ways. In this time of pandemic, to be faithful is to care for others by not gathering in groups and to get creative about the ways we worship.

**Worship**

Through worship, Christians show love, gratitude, and reverence for God. Some of the ways we do this are through communal prayer, music, reading Scripture, listening to proclamation, celebrating Holy Communion, and giving our monetary offerings to God. Over the centuries, we have formalized worship, developing routines that keep us disciplined, consistent, and connected to the global and historical church. However, worship practices also differ across times, places, and cultures depending on what is available and the needs of the worshipers. Over and over again in Scripture, we read that true worship comes from a heart set on God. For instance, the Psalms of praise are focused much less on the particular routines of worship and much more on worshiping God with our whole being, as in Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name,” (v.1). We are fortunate when we can express our hearts’ worship in our church buildings, singing along to music together, and reading responsively. These are important practices. But Scripture is clear that what God desires most is our love and faithfulness. Let us remember this as we seek to find and establish new ways of giving our whole selves to God in worship in our current context.

Find resources for worship in the midst of COVID-19 on the [GNJ Website here](https://www.gnjumc.org/covid19/covid-19-resources/worship-resources/).

## Online Communion

## **During this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, communion may not be done in person.** Leaders in the United Methodist Church hold a variety of understandings about celebrating Holy Communion virtually. Simply, this is the first time Christians have been faced with such a large-scale pandemic in a time when meeting online or through other technology has been possible. This is a new ministry context for everyone. Greater New Jersey bishop, Rev. John Schol, has permitted, though not required, the celebration of Communion online. One reason people may be wary of this practice is that United Methodists understand Holy Communion to be “the communion of the church – the gathered community of the faithful, both local and universal,” (*This Holy Mystery,* 8). In its historical origins, the idea of “the Gathered Community” expresses, primarily, that Communion is a practice of the community, not the individual, and that it cannot be celebrated by one person on behalf of another. Given the current danger of meeting physically, some understand the local church as “gathered” virtually and spiritually, much like the universal church is gathered spiritually. Of course, when it is safe to do so, celebrating the sacrament together physically is preferred. Another potential concern is that an ordained elder or authorized pastor is not present to consecrate the elements of Communion. In the United Methodist Church, ordained elders and authorized pastors, set apart by the church as leaders, invoke the Holy Spirit during Communion, consecrating the elements of bread and wine. However, United Methodists believe that this consecration occurs by the power of the Holy Spirit, making Jesus spiritually present in the elements. The Spirit is not limited by time or space and so some pastors are comfortable with consecrating elements virtually. Ultimately, the decision to offer Communion online is up to the prayerful discernment of each pastor in the local church. Either way, we can be assured that God’s grace, which is never subject to human control, is at work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## If you choose to administer virtual communion, invite participants to wash their hands and gather a piece of bread or cracker and something to drink.  You may follow the normal format of administering the sacrament which should include the following components:

* Proclamation including scripture and message  
  Prayer- asking for forgiveness and the pronouncement of forgiveness
* Greeting – The Lord be with you and also with you, we lift up our hearts…
* Invitation- It is right, and a good and joyful thing…
* Sanctus- Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of power and might…
* Remembering the life of Jesus and the words of institution- On the night in which he gave himself up for us…  
  Proclaiming the mystery- Christ has died, Christ has risen; Christ will come again
* Consecration- Pour out your holy spirit…
* The Lord’s prayer
* Offering the bread and the cup- The body of Christ given, for you.  The blood Christ, given for you.
* Then, invite them to share the elements with others in their home.

Find alternative formatting in the United Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship. [Click here for link to online Book of Worship.](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship)

**Love Feast – An Alternative to Communion**In the New Testament, we read that table fellowship was central to Jesus’ ministry. He shared meals with his disciples, with tax collectors, Pharisees, and many others. Over meals, Jesus brought people together in unity, nourishing them not only physically, but also spiritually. He referred to himself as the bread of life and called his followers to remember him every time they broke bread together. While the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) is the primary meal Christians share together, the Love Feast is another worshipful meal that is more Wesleyan in heritage. John Wesley first experienced the Love Feast with the Moravians in 1737 and wrote in his diary, “After evening prayers, we joined the Germans in one of their love feasts.  It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ.” The Love Feast centers on prayer, fellowship, praise, and scripture to celebrate unity while remembering the meals Jesus shared with his disciples during ministry. In the Love Feast, the meal is not consecrated and so an ordained elder or authorized pastor need not be present, either physically or virtually. This makes the Love Feast a more flexible practice in times when Communion may not possible. The two rituals should not be confused with each other.

The Love Feast offers a more informal opportunity for testimony and Spirit-led prayer and praise, more similar to the kinds of meals people share with loved ones but focused intentionally on God and Christian fellowship. The Love Feast is celebrated especially in times when celebrating communion may not be possible.

Download Love Feast Information Here: Love Feast - An Alternative to Communion

**Funeral Rituals**

Rituals to remember, honor, and lay to rest those who have died are important for the living as they grieve the loss of loved ones. These rituals show respect for the miracle of life lived and also acknowledge the pain and difficulty of death. In both the Old and New Testaments, we read of similar rituals including washing and anointing the bodies of the dead, mourning, and burial. Experiencing the death of a loved one is difficult enough; it is made more difficult and complicated in this time of pandemic and social distancing. We cannot gather in large groups to remember the people we’ve lost, and we cannot engage in all the typical practices that usually surround death. Given these realities, it is especially important to remember what our Christian faith teaches about death. When Jesus was crucified, death was crucified with him. The physical death we experience is no longer ultimate; it no longer has the last word. When Jesus was raised from the dead, we were all given the hope of resurrection life, life that goes beyond our experience of death. Because of this, death – our own and that of others – need not consume us. We do not need to worry that our inability to have full and timely funeral services will somehow negatively impact the souls of our loved ones. We are not in control of that. We can take comfort that it is the Lord who watches over us all. As Romans 14:9 says, “to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.” Of course, this does not make grieving easy, especially in the absence of ritual and fellowship. However, we can rest in the knowledge that, as we do what we can to grieve our loved ones, they and we hold the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Download this comprehensive resource for guidance on how to manage funerals during this time. It includes information on pastoral care, livestreaming services and mourning during this time of social distancing.

[Funeral Best Practices](https://www.gnjumc.org/resource/funeral-best-practices-in-the-time-of-covid-19/)  
[Funeral Liturgy Resources](https://www.gnjumc.org/resource/funeral-liturgy-resources-covid-19/)