

**NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
CORONA-VIRUS GUIDE  
FOR  
PASTORAL LEADERS, JUDICATORIES AND CONGREGATIONS  
March 17, 2020  
Updated March 20 and 21, 2020**

**Updated March 24, 2020 (New Entries in Green)**

With the Covid-19 pandemic bearing down on the globe, New York has one of the highest concentrations of cases in the United States. Given the swirl of pronouncements, orders, legislation and advice, we offer the following guidance and observations. The New York State Council of Churches has prepared this guide for churches and judicatories.

The guide reflects our review of statements and guidance of our denominational, governmental, and advocacy partners. We are also monitoring emerging laws, executive orders, and legislation to deal with the crisis. Please bring to our attention any updates or critiques, and we will seek to modify the guide as the number of reported cases undoubtedly will continue to expand.

Our communication is a communal process. This is also a moment where churches need to exercise good leadership in the public square. Stay well informed about emerging public policy, advocate accordingly, and reach out to your communities. Remember, your parish is your neighborhood and city and not just who is in your four walls.

According to the Wisconsin Council of Churches:

*“Churches around the world are learning how to be imaginative in their ministry in order to be present to those in need in a time of social disruption. From the experiences of communities facing crises around the world, we know that faith leaders can play a transformational role in calming fear, disseminating accurate information, and modifying religious practices to help keep people safe while providing spiritual care and honoring important community traditions.*

*We see our role as churches, leaders, and compassionate Christians as:*

- *Combating fear with knowledge in order to encourage preparedness and decrease stigma*
- *maintaining operational continuity and continuing expressions of Christian life in the case of quarantine and disruption*
- *showing God’s compassion and care to those in our communities who are affected”*

If you have not already done so, you might consider forming at your church and/or judicatory, a COVID response team who can review ecclesiastical and government recommendations, and be in touch with various entities and denominational leaders to discern action steps and what can profitably be shared with your congregations.

## **PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS**

Having served as a pastor for three congregations, I understand the pressure of caring for our “members” first before serving the community. Some pastors grow weary of members who think we should offer extra kindness to them before getting to people in our neighborhoods. Institutional inertia can lead the faithful to forget that there are other faithful, who never come to our church, who clean our houses and public space, mow our lawns, clean our elder’s bed sheets, and take care of our children.

Fortunately, so many pastors are saying, during the Covid-19 crisis, that God- created religious institutions send people out to care for those which others declare as not belonging. The golden rule comes to mind. Neighboring is what we call it. We care for our members but resist the pressure to be apolitical and turn our congregations into country clubs. While adapting to public health restrictions, we keep our ministries open to serve the homeless and provide food for the hungry.

Congregations are employing their staffs and volunteers to do the best public ministry they know how by using virtual technology for worship and AA groups, calling others instead of texting, and reaching out in ways they never imagined. We encourage people to be more creative in the way they volunteer. We speak out in the public square for a more God centered society. One church just shelved its weekly benediction to say, “this service ends here, and more service happens outside these walls”. In this spirit, we call on Federal and State Governments to not balance their budgets on the backs of the poor, and center their aid on for profit and non-profit institutions that don’t line the pockets of CEOs but are committed to firing no one and seeking the common good. In the middle of a public health crisis, we call on government to invest in our medical care and to not exclude any one especially elderly and undocumented people. We ask for reductions in the prison population. We ask the Federal Government to not facilitate any state cuts to Medicaid. We will not tolerate policies which inflict more pain on the infirm and the least of these. Instead, we call on everyone to contribute to the common good as they are able. We join the Patriotic Millionaires in calling on the very wealthiest New Yorkers, who are doing surprisingly well during this crisis, to be taxed more to do their part. Indeed, Amazon just announced it is hiring 100,000 more people. A hedge fund manager just scored millions on stock market fluctuations.

But while we keep our ministries vital to serve our communities and speak out for just public policy, we ask our lawmakers to help us help others. Faith leaders across the state just sent a letter to Washington asking for assistance, consistent with separation of church and state, to keep faith institution’s public infrastructure in place. [Click here](#) for the letter facilitated by New York State Council of Churches and Judson Memorial Church’s Bricks and Mortals which is committed to helping congregations improve their buildings for service. More signatures are welcome. Do give the money to workers so they can pay their tithe. Washington seeks to assist

corporations and not-for-profits keep their workers. We also ask for the same assistance to keep faith communities strong to help us be the long-term blessing our country needs. We will put it to good use. Not all congregations can move beyond their self-absorption. But those who do are essential, essential services.

The Reverend Peter Cook  
Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches

## **NPR Story**

To offer you a little perspective and guidance I commend to you with this uplifting [interview](#) with a Rabbi, an Imam, and an Episcopal Bishop which was broadcast on NPR which perhaps will lend a little perspective.

## **Acts 2:43 to 47**

The Corona Virus reminds us of the communal aspects of our faith where we bear one another's burdens and care for any one who has need.

## **The book of Acts reminds us that:**

*“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”*

A more secular reflection which mirrors the counsel in the book of Acts can draw on our traditions of caring for the poor and bearing each other's be found in this [Messaging Guide](#) published by the [Million Voters Project](#), a coalition of 7 statewide and regional community organizing networks: [A APIs for Civic Engagement](#), [Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment](#), [California Calls](#), [Coalition for the Humane Immigrant Rights](#), Orange County Civic Engagement Table, [PICO California](#) and [Power California](#).

## **Prayers from National Council of Churches**

During this time in which the whole world is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, National Council of Church is posting Daily Bible Readings from the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching, Spring 2020, play a meditation to guide your prayers for inspiration and engagement. You can follow daily readings, prayers. And meditations on NCC website at <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/topics/daily/>

**Leviticus 19:1-17, NRSV**

## **Ancient Prescripts for Holiness**

(Those following the Home Daily Bible Readings will also read Leviticus 22:17-25 )

19:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. 3 You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. 4 Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the Lord your God.

5 When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable in your behalf. 6 It shall be eaten on the same day you offer it, or on the next day; and anything left over until the third day shall be consumed in fire. 7 If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination; it will not be acceptable. 8 All who eat it shall be subject to punishment, because they have profaned what is holy to the Lord; and any such person shall be cut off from the people.

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

11 You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. 12 And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

13 You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. 14 You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

15 You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer[a] among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood[b] of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

17 You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

## **That Same Promise**

*By Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst, Ecumenical Staff Officer, Leadership Development, The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church*

*My favorite Scripture passage when I was growing up was Joshua 1:9 (... "be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever*

*you go.*”) I was very shy, and my Sunday School teacher gave me that passage, typed onto a small strip of paper, to keep with me. Even today that beat-up, little piece of paper remains in my wallet. The simple reminder of God’s persistent presence no matter where I go or what happens has given me hope and security time and time again throughout my life. And now, as we walk through these current disconcerting times, it is that same promise that can help to keep all of us united in God’s peace. As the Statement of Faith from the United Church of Canada says: “God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God (United Methodist Book Hymnal, 1989, #883).”

**So, we pray:**

Holy God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, we join our hearts in unified love for you. We worship you; we give you thanks; we trust completely in you. And, even though we are necessarily separated by space and location, we renew our resolve to be united as your church in this time. So, we humbly ask you to remind us again of your power and presence in our lives. Make this Council of Churches both smart and fearless. Find surprising ways to teach us daily how to walk in this world as your children, even when that separation seems so great. And, Holy God, show us how to rest in your son’s arms. It is to him we lift our hearts and prayers of concern, wonder and need. We do trust, and we know we are not alone. It is in the name of Christ we pray.

Amen.

**From Faithful America:**

*God is our refuge in the storm, and will be with us no matter what happens. When we pray, we can give thanks for that comforting presence, growing ever closer to God in hard times. We can also ask for strength to take the necessary steps and health precautions.*

*Below is a prayer for this moment from retired Lutheran Bishop Martin Wells. (You may also appreciate this [litany from America: The Jesuit Review](#).)*

*God of healing and hope; in Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear. Look with mercy on those who have contracted the new virus, on any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger. Through this time of global concern, by your Holy Spirit bring out the best not the worst in us. Make us more aware of our interdependence on each other, and of the strength that comes from being one body in you. Through Christ our wounded healer, Amen.*

**Prayer for a Pandemic prepared by St. Mary’s Academy in Portland, offered by Bishop John Macholz, Upstate New York Synod, ELCA**

*May we who are merely inconvenienced  
Remember those whose lives are at stake.*

*May we who have no risk factors  
Remember those most vulnerable.*

*May we who have the luxury of working from home  
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.*

*May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close  
Remember those who have no options.*

*May we who have to cancel our trips  
Remember those that have no safe place to go.*

*May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market  
Remember those who have no margin at all.*

*May we who settle in for a quarantine at home  
Remember those who have no home.*

*As fear grips our country,  
Let us choose love.*

*During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find  
ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.*

*Amen.*

St. Mary's Academy, Portland.

## **BASIC ADVICE AND FEDERAL AND STATE COMMUNICATIONS**

**New York Interfaith Disaster Services has issued a comprehensive directive high lighting the Governor's PAUSE order as it relates to the needs of houses of worship. They do not issue communications until they have conferred with the New York State Department of Health to ensure accuracy. Please [click here](#) see the full NYDIS Communication. In this Guide we will amplify these official communications.**

## **STATUS OF COVID 19 SPREAD**

NYDIS tells us.

*“Known COVID-19 infections have surpassed 10,000 and 60 fatalities - -numbers which will continue to grow significantly in the coming weeks and months. The worst is yet to come. Our job is to prevent the spread, to prevent one another from being exposed and therefore not expose those in high-risk categories who can easily suffer extreme infections or death.*

*We call upon all NYC religious leaders, lay and ordained, to stay home as much as possible, except when conducting essential congregation-based social services, going out to purchase essential food and household items, or to take a walk alone while practicing social distancing.*

*NYC and New York State have banned virtually all gatherings and are requiring the reduction of essential staff to 25% in office staffing as well as requiring the temporary closure of all non-essential businesses in order to reduce density and help contain further spread of COVID-19.”*

## **CHURCH CLOSINGS AND WORSHIP ONLINE**

1. Faith leaders can continue to record services and live stream using their equipment in their sanctuaries. They are not required to record from home although some pastors may choose to do so.
2. The Governor's office, even with the emergency order in place, has said that "houses of worship are not ordered closed and services can be held and social distance maintained. However, the Governor is pretty emphatic that churches go virtual. NYDIS has issued its own directive saying there should not be in-person worship under any circumstances.

My own commentary, as one who has served as a pastor in three congregations, is that faith leaders really need to ask themselves, out of love for the people they serve, whether they wish to place parishioners at risk by meeting in person.

Given these restrictions, you should consider conducting digital or phone based worship gatherings. The Wisconsin Council of Churches offers these [Resources for Streaming Worship](#) and a webinar on March 24 [Creating Live-Streamed Worship from 1 to 2 Central Time](#). Your denomination may also conduct a region wide digital worship service. For instance, the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York plans to hold a service on March 22.

Faithful America commends this article "from Sojourners, '[Community Without Communing: Resources for Virtual Church](#).' You might also appreciate TechSoup's "[How to Broadcast a Facebook Live Event in 5 Easy Steps](#)." (To make sure non-Facebook users can watch your live event, read Facebook's own instructions on [embedding their videos onto your website](#).) Smaller churches might consider something like [FreeConferenceCall.com](#) for a simple audio-only prayer service.

If you are non-denominational, take advantage of the public materials from other churches, including [the Episcopal Church](#), [Presbyterian Disaster Assistance](#), [the United Methodist Church](#), [the United Church of Christ](#) and [the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington](#)."

**The Governor's Office of Faith Based Initiatives has offered this very helpful and detailed [Faith on Facebook Took Kit](#).**

## **LAST RITES, FUNERALS, RECEPTIONS, AND PASTORAL CARE.**

**According to New York Interfaith Disaster Services**

*"Regarding Last Rites and other bedside rituals or prayers. NYIDS recommends clergy work with family or healthcare professionals to offer prayers via video chat (examples: FaceTime, Snap Chat or WhatsApp).*

*If Holy Communion or Holy Oil/Anointing of the Sick are to be administered, NYDIS recommends that communion and/or a cotton ball soaked in holy oil, be placed in separate zip*

*lock bags, given to family or nursing staff, and administered under video supervision accompanied by prayers offered by a priest or other duly appointed religious leader.*

*If, in accordance with any faith traditions **prayers for the sick and/or dying** are to be offered, they should be offered by the appropriate lay or ordained leader via video chat with a family member or medical professional holding the device bedside.*

*Regarding **Funerals or Burial**: House of worship and funeral home funerals should be suspended, and the dead should be buried or interred during a graveside service of no more than 10 people who strictly adhere to social distancing protocols. Individuals traveling to the burial should only travel with members of their own household – if anyone is unwell, they must not attend. If desirable, the service may be live streamed or recorded to share with others not able to attend.*

***No Repast or Receptions** should be held following burial or cremation. For Jews, **no Shiva** should be held in person. Shiva calls should be made virtually.*

*All pastoral care, spiritual care, and **in-person visitations** should be suspended. Use social media, phone calls to share regular healing prayers and message to help communities remain hopeful.*

*All congregations should encourage members to take care of and check-in on their elderly and vulnerable neighbors. With the ability to travel being curtailed. Only neighbors helping neighbors will hold our humanity together – children and family cannot travel safely to care for family, we must care for them ourselves.”*

**Given the strict guidelines regarding funerals, if your tradition allows it, you may consider a common practice of doing a graveside service and burial and then work with the family to do a memorial service at a future date once the COVID Crisis passes. Stay in touch with the family during this in between period to offer pastoral care within in safety guidelines. Offer to reach out to those on the periphery who may also be suffering and, of course, continue to offer care for congregants who might be grieving. Some families might even prefer to postpone the burial itself especially if one is burying ashes. Confer with your own funeral home director about your options including costs for burial and other services. Please be aware that funeral home directors may call on you to do services for non-members or you may be called for help by non-members. It’s important that you treat all requests with equal amounts of compassion and generosity for members and non-members alike. Confer with colleagues if you are trying to think your way through complicated pastoral interactions during this crisis.**

## **COLLEGIALITY, SELF CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

Pastors and chaplains should make an effort to confer with one another and not socially isolate. If you are a pastor, call your chaplains at care facilities and prisons and ask them how it is going and if they need help. This would be a good time to get better acquainted with your colleagues



for support if you have not already done so. Judicatories may also organize support calls for clergy. For example, New York Conference, United Church of Christ is offering pastoral town meetings for clergy on line. The Episcopal Diocese has also created virtual clergy gatherings. The Poor People's Campaign is arranging support circles across the state.

### **Take care of your mental health, and check in on others in need.**

It is just as important to take seriously the coming mental and emotional toll as it is to take seriously the coronavirus itself. This is a time to live our values and care for one another.

Call your loved ones. Talk to your pastor about setting up a phone tree so that isolated parishioners can receive a friendly phone call each day. Be kind to overworked retail staff. Stand up to the anti-Asian racism that's spreading alongside all the fake news.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has five suggestions for "[Taking Care of Your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty.](#)"

Pastors may appreciate *Christian Century's* "[10 guidelines for pastoral care during the coronavirus outbreak.](#)"

And all of us can take heart from [quarantined Italian neighborhoods singing together from their windows](#), and from this article in the *Seattle Times*: "[Coronavirus sparks an epidemic of people helping people in Seattle.](#)"

## **WORKING FROM HOME, REACHING CHURCH STAFF, AND PASTORAL CARE STRATEGIES**

If at all possible, have your employees work from home but ensure your parishioners know how to be in touch with them. If you have not done so already, update your call systems at church with clear instructions on how those who call can locate a staff person and with provision to leave a confidential voice mail so people do not have to leave a message on the general answering machine.

## **FORM A CORONA VIRUS RESPONSE TEAM**

### **Judicatories and congregations, if they have not already done so, could set up Corona Virus Response Teams**

1. Set up phone trees or online vehicles of communication to stay in touch with people who might be socially isolated, homebound or in institutions (prisons, nursing homes etc.)
2. Ascertain whether people need food and/or help with child care. Urge your parishioners not to hoard supplies at supermarkets and share, when possible, with others.

3. Communicate with denominational leadership
4. Monitor government communications regarding the crisis and speak out on legislation and policy as needed.
5. Reach out to local food pantries and shelters to ascertain needs and to offer volunteers, donations, money as appropriate. Please refer to [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) for more description of the various forms of food assistance available.

## **CHURCH FINANCES**

1. If you have not done so already, this would be a good time to institute a tool for online contributions
2. If you have endowments or investments, you should confer with your investment advisor about your portfolio.
3. You may need dollars to expand compensation for a more rigorous cleaning protocol.
4. Remember reaching out to your parishioners and the community at large and doing good ministry, is also good financial practice in that you have your membership and community more closely identify with your institution because you have cared for them. As you become more generous with others they will be more generous with you. This is a moment when you can be the church at its best. People will want to invest in that sort of church. Pastors, this is a good opportunity to share the pastoral load with your lay leaders and volunteer groups.
5. Be on look out for people in your church who can give extra dollars or donate goods and services in kind to offset some drop in giving from parishioners experiencing financial uncertainty or hardship. Some might also be able and willing to pre-pay their pledges so you do not have to prematurely draw from investments or to make up for possible drops in giving.
6. The United States Congress and the state are actively considering additional financial stimulus packages. Have someone on your COVID Response Team monitor emerging legislation and recommend action.
7. **Financial Assistance for Churches in Federal Stimulus Package? Bricks and Mortals of Judson Church, New York State Council of Churches and the Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness facilitated a letter, Faith Communities for COVID-19 Relief to call on Congress to offer faith communities some kind of financial assistance to match with relief already being considered for the not-for-**

profit and for profit sections of the economy. [Click here](#) to view the letter. If you are a faith leader who would like to sign on to the letter, contact The Reverend Peter Cook at [Pcook@Nyscoc.org](mailto:Pcook@Nyscoc.org) or 508-380-8289.

8. We also invite you to review your church's insurance policies to see if they can cover any losses including payment for business interruption. We are currently trying to ascertain the extent to which church policies can cover losses and if we legal or state regulatory intervention is required.

## PUBLIC ACTIONS ON STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATION AND STATE BUDGET

### Absentee Voting

Attorney General Lettia James has called for use to absentee ballots for the April 28 New York Primary. [Click here](#) to see her press release. Its unclear how absentee voting where everyone could would receive a ballot by mail. Stay tuned.

### Financial Assistance for Houses of Worship

Bricks and Mortals of Judson Church, New York State Council of Churches and the Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness facilitated a letter, Faith Communities for COVID-19 Relief to call on Congress to offer faith communities some kind of financial assistance to match with relief already being considered for the not-for-profit and for profit sections of the economy. [Click here](#) to view the letter. If you are a faith leader who would like to sign on to the letter, contact The Reverend Peter Cook at [Pcook@Nyscoc.org](mailto:Pcook@Nyscoc.org) or 508-380-8289.

### Fines and Fees

1. The Fines and Fees Justice Center has written to Governor Cuomo expressing concern about traffic stops and fines which we disproportionately burden the most vulnerable and those least able to pay. They have issued [policy recommendations](#) for all jurisdictions nationwide. Please use them wherever they are helpful to your advocacy.
2. We are tracking local fines and fees reforms that individual jurisdictions are implementing in response to the crisis. Please forward any developments that you believe we should be tracking.
3. They plan to follow up with his office to share a list of organizations in support of the recommendations in this letter. If you would like your organization name added to the list of supporters, please let me know by Wednesday, 3/25.

### Support Federal Grants to States

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), New York State Budget Director Robert Mujica is forecasting up to a 15 billion dollar shortfall to the state of New York budget.

Here is [Joint Letter](#) sent by the Governor's of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania asking for at least 100 billion in Federal aid to shore up state budgets.

### **Support Federal Reserve Mandate to Buy State & Local Municipal Debt**

**We are calling on Senator Schumer to request the Federal Reserve purchase state municipal bonds which could result in billions for state assistance. [Click here to see more details. Here is the bill overview.](#)** The following e-mail can be used by inserting it in Schumer's e-mail portal [by clicking here](#)

Dear Senator Schumer,

State and local governments are the front line first responders to the Coronavirus epidemic. They will experience significant costs in responding to the epidemic while at the same time their major sources of tax revenue, most notably sales taxes, will decline enormously due to social distancing and quarantine measures.

- I encourage you to include \$100 billion or more in direct grants to state governments for pandemic response in the Stimulus 3 package.
- I also encourage you to support Representative Maxine Waters' proposal to mandate the Federal Reserve to purchase municipal bonds issued by states and localities for the pandemic response.
- I encourage you to keep the Medicaid maintenance of effort requirement that is part of the Families First FMAP increase to protect people on Medicaid while adding more funding for essential programs.

These measures could surge the needed billions of dollars into our New York state budget right now.

Our state can not fight off the coronavirus and provide the necessary safety net for our communities without more funding. Please fight for New York and ensure this critical provision is included in the final stimulus package being negotiated as we speak

### **Third Federal Stimulus Package**

**Negotiations continue in Washington to come up with a 2 Trillion Dollar Plus Aid package. Today, Speaker Pelosi warned against the Senate introducing "poison pills" which would**

make it hard for the House to support the package and would possibly introduce the House plan as a replacement. [Here is the article in the Hill.](#)

According to **Laura Cardwell**, Director of Operations & Events, Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State

*“New York now has 5% of COVID-19 cases worldwide. Our state’s crisis is only getting worse and will continue to do so, especially for our most vulnerable populations: seniors, people with disabilities and those who are immunocompromised. Unsurprisingly, these are also the groups which most heavily rely on Medicaid in order to have their healthcare needs met. Governor Cuomo’s Medicaid Redesign Team held a rushed process over the past few months, with little transparency or study as to what the impact of cutting programs like long-term care would have on beneficiaries. He promised in his budget address that beneficiaries would not be impacted – that is simply not true. Now, as the state budget wraps this week, he is continuing to try and push through dangerous, large-scale budget cuts to programs in the midst of a public health crisis. It is irresponsible given we have no idea when this crisis will end, or what the state’s healthcare needs will be on the other side. Senator Schumer has been fighting for New Yorkers and has already secured over \$6 billion in federal aid for New York to combat this crisis, which will also help plug the state’s Medicaid budget deficit for now. It is ludicrous that Governor Cuomo would try to cut our state’s Medicaid budget at the same time Senator Schumer is working to deliver additional funding. Senator Schumer has secured what is essentially a Medicaid bailout for New York, so that we can maintain the level of care and services we have now for our most vulnerable populations. In the very least, it should allow Governor Cuomo to extend the MRT process, to look more closely at what impact their decisions will have and revisit MRT recommendations when the crisis is over and we have a clearer picture of what New York’s needs are, and where. Gov. Cuomo is not only wrong to try and push through dangerous budget cuts during this crisis, he does not need to, because our congressional delegates like Senator Schumer have stepped in to secure Medicaid funding and alleviate our budget woes. Why does Gov. Cuomo need to cut Medicaid now when he just got \$6 billion in federal aid to help the state?”*

**Laura Cardwell**

Director of Operations & Events

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**In** an effort to put pressure on Governor Cuomo to halt the MRT II’s proposed cuts to Medicaid in the state budget this week, we are asking you to use Twitter to call attention to the fact that Senator Schumer has already helped secure over \$6 billion in federal aid for New York State. Gov. Cuomo’s continued desire to slash the Medicaid budget now is not only putting further federal aid being secured by our Senator at risk, it is now unnecessary given increased federal funds – and dangerous when we do not know when the COVID-19 crisis will end.

To give you an idea of content, below are a few example Tweets, as well as a paragraph detailing our argument, from which you could pull language or ideas to draft your own Tweets. Please

know that organic content drafted from your perspective resonates best and should tag @NYGovCuomo. We encourage you to share this with providers, consumers, personal assistants, families – anyone who will be impacted by these drastic cuts to Medicaid.

It is our hope that by highlighting how Senator Schumer is fighting for New Yorkers in Congress, we will encourage Gov. Cuomo to rethink his own budget which harms them.

### Sample Tweets:

- Congress delivered \$6 billion in vital public health funding for New Yorkers to combat the #COVID19 crisis. It will help address @NYGovCuomo's budget challenges, so why does he want to turn around and cut Medicaid now?
- Thanks to Schumer, NY is getting billions to fight #COVID and support our healthcare system. Unfortunate that @NYGovCuomo wants to risk that funding in order to slash #Medicaid and put our most vulnerable people more at risk of losing coverage and vital services
- NY essentially got a \$6 billion bailout from Congress to deal with our #Medicaid budget crisis. @NYGovCuomo this is not the time to negate that help with more budget cuts, when our seniors and disabled - those who largely rely on Medicaid - are most at risk in this crisis

**According to Mary Clark, Federal Coordinator for Citizen Action “Federal lawmakers continue to debate a third stimulus package. We must drive messages to lawmakers and the public that the relief package must help all people -- not just be a slush fund for the corporations.**

### 1. Join the COVID-19 #ProtectAllPeople Twitter Storm today and tomorrow

#### Sample tweets:

*Tell @NYGovCuomo to accept the \$6.7 Billion in emergency federal Medicaid funding and abandon Medicaid cuts at this critical time! During the #COVID19 pandemic and in the future, we need to make sure the Medicaid Maintenance of Effort is maintained. #ProtectAllPeople*

*Thank you @SenSchumer for standing strong and putting people first in the stimulus package. Make sure the Medicaid Maintenance of Effort is maintained so @NYGovCuomo cannot cut Medicaid for New Yorkers at this critical time. #AJustStimulus*

*The coronavirus crisis has held a harsh spotlight on the fact that our country fails to adequately protect working people. Urge Congress to expand #PaidSickDays and #PaidLeave in the emergency response to #COVID19! #AJustStimulus*

2. Call Senator Charles Schumer at (202) 224-6542 and Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand at (202) 224-4451 and . Here is a sample voicemail message:

“Hello, my name is ----- from ----- [zip code]. I'm calling to thank you for standing strong. Please put people first before corporations as you consider relief options. We need direct cash assistance, permanent paid sick leave, expanded unemployment insurance, student debt forgiveness, and immigrant inclusion in all programs. No corporate bailout without restrictions. Make sure the Medicaid Maintenance of Effort is maintained so Governor Cuomo cannot cut Medicaid at this critical time. He needs to take the Federal Medicaid dollars and abandon his proposed cuts to Medicaid in the New York budget.”

**Background:** Governor Cuomo is claiming the federal package of aid is stopping him from passing a budget. Don't be fooled. Cuomo wants to cut Medicaid funding in our state budget; funding that is critical for vulnerable communities. The Federal Government is offering New York State \$6.7 Billion of Federal Medicaid Funding with one caveat – states are forbidden to cut any existing Medicaid Funding. This is called Maintenance of Effort. To receive the federal funds, states must maintain existing programs and not pass costs on to counties. Cuomo must abandon the cuts and take the federal money being offered. More: <https://www.empirecenter.org/publications/are-cuomos-hands-tied-on-medicaid/>

### **Advocacy for a More Just Budget with a Humorous Twist**

For those with a good sense of humor, consider this offering from Empire State Indivisible which perhaps most clearly illustrates the political dynamic in Albany where the Senate and Assembly is reluctant to assert their leadership to modify the state budget so that it is not so austere.

[Wizard of Oz press release](#)--since it is what the legislature would release if they only had a brain, a heart, the nerve. Please make any comments or suggestions, and if your group would like to add a quote in support of the perfect budget, please add it on in! Stay tuned for its faux-release and how to boost it.

Make your own video

You can post your own Budget Justice video using Indivisible's Soapboxx tool, please do so TODAY—it's incredibly easy. Here are the instructions.

1. Go to <https://indivisible.soapboxx.us/prompt-single/NYbudgetjustice> All the instructions you need are there, and it's easy. Keep recording until you are happy with your take. (Pro tip: You can have a script up on your computer and read from it if, like me, you don't like to wing it. It will look like you're talking to the camera.)
2. The question we are answering is "What does budget justice mean to you? Why do you think our electeds should be fighting for it?"
3. Indivisible will process your video and return it to you with our BuJu logo and captions. Upload to twitter using the hashtag: #BudgetJustice. Be sure to tag your NY state senator, [@AndreaSCousins](#) and [@NYGovCuomo](#). Ricky is making a

thread of them, so put a link to your tweet in the Slack #messaging-media channel and/or the BuJu Twitter room so yours can be added and amplified. Have a look at those that have been posted already, for inspiration: [https://twitter.com/es\\_indivisible/status/1241424742722256900?s=20](https://twitter.com/es_indivisible/status/1241424742722256900?s=20) If you don't have a Twitter account or have difficulty uploading to Twitter, just email it to me or Ricky or upload to this folder and message the #messaging-media channel on Slack, where one of the groups will pick it up and post it for you. [https://drive.google.com/open?id=16IC\\_tM2M6Ht26yu--29gFRUXGyx9Htp](https://drive.google.com/open?id=16IC_tM2M6Ht26yu--29gFRUXGyx9Htp)

4. If you are camera shy, be creative--show us something in your neighborhood or a related object while you talk about Budget Justice.

Keep related messaging coming on Twitter, email, and via electeds' Facebook pages (which Divya Nair of West Harlem Progressive Dems has kindly compiled in [this spreadsheet](#). (Don't call the Albany or district offices; no one is there to answer, and the voicemail needs to be kept clear for constituent services. But do take the opportunity to ask and encourage them to hold Facebook Live office hours.

### **Homelessness Sign On Letter and Shelter Assistance**

VOCAL-NY and allies released [this open letter](#) to Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo yesterday calling on them to protect homeless NYers amid COVID-19. Right now in shelters people are in crowded rooms with no major changes to sanitation or the ability to social distance. On the streets, people are running out of places to eat and shower.

We are hoping faith leaders can sign on to this letter by (Tues, 3/24) at 3:30PM by following this link to sign-on: <https://www.changethenypd.org/endorse-protect-homeless-covid-open-letter-cuomo-de-blasio>

Please boost [tweets](#) on social media and use the hashtags #HomelessCantStayHome and #ProtectHomelessFromCOVID.

The Coalition for the Homeless is calling on the Department of Housing Services in New York City to make allowance for more private rooms for homeless people since having people sleep and gather in large congregate areas can facilitate spread of the virus. They have also called on the Federal Government for 5 billion in housing relief since there was no provision for housing assistance in the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#). Read this article from [Politico](#) for more details.

### **Urge Passage of Home Stability Support**

The Covid-19 crisis highlights once again the limitations of our shelter system. This is why we strongly urge passage of the Home Stability Support which will keep people in their homes which is safer, more stable and less expensive than having to rely on homeless shelters. Please call the Governor and your Member of the Assembly and State Senator and urge them to pass



Home Stability Support. [Click here](#) for our newsletter with more instructions on how to advocate.

### **Reduction in Jail and Prison Population**

One strategy for risk reduction in prisons is to release prisoners who are elderly, once they are tested, and also to release those incarcerated with minor or non-violent offenses. Some release is already taking place in New York City. On March 19, State Senator Allesandra Biaggi called on Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio to work with the New York City and State Departments of Corrections to create and implement an immediate emergency plan to reduce jail population density, and protect vulnerable incarcerated individuals and employees on Rikers Island against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

According to March 20 City and State First Read, “In jails and prisons, the coronavirus crisis requires swiftly segregating populations with symptoms, ensuring that guards possibly infected go home and stay, providing access to protective equipment to all staff and releasing inmates worthy of early release, [the Daily News writes.](#)”

### **No Rollbacks on Bail and Discover Laws**

We continue to advocate for no rollbacks on current bail laws. [Click here](#) to view a letter to Governor Cuomo signed by 165 faith leaders asking that there be no modification of the law. We strongly opposed roll backs and do not support allowing judges to incarcerate people based on their evaluation of dangerousness, a practice which has been outlawed in New York for over 50 years long before the new laws were put in affect. It’s important to note under current laws, judges actually have more discretion to do pre-trial incarceration they just can’t use bail for non-violence offenses as a discretionary tool.

You can also see a Facebook post by Trinity Wall Street by clicking [here](#) and a Tweet by clicking [here](#). In addition, 100 Rabbis signed a letter in [Jewish Forward](#).

Here is also [petition](#) to the Governor regarding prison labor, clemency and bail reform.

[Human Rights Watch](#) has also published policy recommendations on the Coronavirus and incarceration.

There is a Bail Reform Update & Strategy Call call on March 27, at 2:00 in which you can participate. Register [here](#) to join the call if you haven't yet done so.

It remains the case that Governor Cuomo and Senate Leader Cousins are pushing very hard to revise the new bail law to include dangerousness as a criteria judges can use to detain people pre-trial. Assembly Speaker Heastie has remained firm in his resolve to hold the line and not include dangerousness. [Click here](#) for a background paper on the problems for the use of dangerousness as criteria for pre-incarceration. [Click here](#) for other background materials.

There are many reasons there should be no roll back but the Covid-19 crisis highlights the need not to increase the jail population including an increase in people held pre-trial should the Bail and Discovery laws be revised.

It is urgent that we continue to hold our elected leaders accountable to standing up for racial justice AND public health. Please use this [NEW social media toolkit](#) to tell Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and all of our representatives: #NoRollbacks! Please post TODAY.

For more background on efforts to prevent the roll back of bail and discovery laws we refer you to [this communication](#) from Bronx Connect. In addition, [Click here](#) for the #NYFaithLeaders4 Bail Reform Packet.

### **Immigrants, Unemployed**

A third Federal stimulus bill continues to stall in the Senate as of March 24. On March 20, we learned that the recent Federal legislation intended to provide sick leave, unemployment and other benefits along with additional stimulus in a third legislative package. explicitly excluded undocumented people. [Click here](#) to view a letter which was sent to Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Schumer on March 20 by a variety of organizations and faith leaders. If you did not sign the letter, you can still adapt it to your purposes and address it to additional people including Senate Majority Leader McConnell, House Minority Leader McCarthy, and your individual Congressperson. [Click here](#) for a quick sign on letter to advocate for immigrants as part of the bill. We also, again, strongly urge you to reach out to the immigrant residents in your community on whom you rely for many services to hear their story and ask how you can be of assistance including advocacy with your lawmakers.

Many immigrant and non-immigrant workers, and small business owners are losing their jobs and may not have access to government assistance. There are two petitions from New York Workers Center to ask help is included in state and Federal legislation. For the petition focused on workers [click here](#) and [click here](#) for the petition for small business.

### **Education**

The Alliance for Quality Education seeks restoration of Foundation Aid for schools to the tune of 4 billion. They sponsor everyday actions and daily 11AM Facebook Live and 4PM Instagram.

### **ACCESS TO TESTING AND HEALTH CARE**

If a parishioner is sick or displays symptoms of Corona Virus, they should stay home. If after 3 to 4 days of symptoms or if you are very ill reach out to their doctor for advice and to determine if they should be tested. Advocate for any one who might have trouble accessing their insurance benefits which are owed to them or find costs unbearable because underinsurance.

We urge you to be in touch with parishioners regarding their health insurance and the care they receive at this time. Many are either under insured or have no insurance. [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump along with other aid packages, provides for some health benefits including free testing for Corona virus. The Governor has instructed health insurance companies to not charge co-pays for remote doctor consultations.

Call your elected representatives for assistance and case management and use the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) for reference.

## **PAID SICK LEAVE, FOOD ASSISTANCE, UNEMPLOYMENT**

Check in to be sure parishioners have access to paid sick leave and access to childcare and food. The United States Congress passed sick leave provisions and expanded unemployment insurance, provision for a parent to stay home if the school of their children is closed, and relief for businesses and the self-employed. Again, refer to the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act which passed on March 19](#) It is worth noting that the Response Act, with regard to sick leave, only applies to companies under 500 people. Companies under 50 employees can apply for a hardship exemption. These rules would suggest only about 20% of our population is covered under this legislation.

**Given the short comings in the Federal bill, state lawmakers passed on March 18 a sick leave law to address the Corona virus and to have a more permanent provision for sick leave in place once the virus subsides. Remember the already scaled back Federal law is time limited. There is, however, a third stimulus bill still being debated in Congress as of March 24.**

**Independent contractors and businesses of one don't qualify for much of Federal aid. We recommend Direct assistance to in the form of debt deferment for credit cards and mortgage debt. We need to find ways to expand the safety net for them and to help them qualify of unemployment insurance.**

## **PRISONS AND THE INCARCERATED CHURCH**

**Department of Corrections and Community Supervision has moved to a system with one chaplain going to work a day. The chaplain continues to handle death notices and grief counseling and can meet with prisoners in person. They can also walk the halls to meet with prisoners with increased visits to medical units. Legal counsel can confer with clients behind glass. No small group meetings and in-person-worship is allowed. Chaplains have to work with a wide variety of religious groups, as they always do. It's particularly challenging at this time to help different groups navigate new safety restrictions.**

In addition, inmates will be able to receive five (5) free stamps per week for use in accordance with [Directive #4422](#), "Inmate Correspondence Program,"

Two (2) free secure messages per week via electronic tablet, and One (1) free phone call per week in accordance with [Directive #4423](#) “Inmate Telephone Calls.”

Needless to say both prisoners and employees are particularly vulnerable to an outbreak of the virus. Once again, we urge pastors to reach out to their local prison chaplains to ask how they can be of support. Contact Peter Cook at 508-380-8289 or [Pcook@nyscoc.org](mailto:Pcook@nyscoc.org) if you need help identifying the chaplain in your local Department of Corrections facility.

One strategy for risk reduction in prisons is to release prisoners who are elderly, once they are tested, and also to release those incarcerated with minor or non-violent offenses. Some release is already taking place in New York City. On March 19, State Senator Allesandra Biaggi called on Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio to work with the New York City and State Departments of Corrections to create and implement an immediate emergency plan to reduce jail population density, and protect vulnerable incarcerated individuals and employees on Rikers Island against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

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## **NURSING HOMES AND IN HOME CARE**

For those who wish to visit parishioners in extended care facilities, the Governor has banned these visits for the time being. You will need to find other ways to stay in touch with residents including phone calls and video conferencing. Call the facility to ask for guidance and ascertain what accommodations can be offered at this time. If you have an IT person on your judicatory staff or in your congregation who could help isolated people access online communication platforms, please do so. One suggestion, was to use e-cards to communicate with residents.

Please be aware that home care workers cannot access facemasks and hand sanitizer and find it a struggle to their job given social distancing requirements. For a fuller discussion the challenges read [this article in City & State](#).

Please also be aware of Medicaid funding issues for long term care which your parishioners might be encountering.

As noted earlier in this Guide on March 19, the Medicaid Redesign Team issued its final set of recommendations to the Governor on March 19. The Team was appointed by the Governor to find Medicaid savings in order to balance the budget. It backed a plan that would slash Medicaid spending to New York's hospitals by almost \$400 million as the facilities scramble to address the coronavirus epidemic, [the New York Post reports](#). Cuts contemplated, which we are working to prevent from going into effect, include financial assistance to home care givers to prevent people from having to go to more expensive nursing homes which now have visitation moratorium due to the virus.

For those of you with elderly parishioners who might be in long term care, be advised that the Medicaid Design Team recommended to Governor Cuomo cutting \$22 million in spending on home and long-term care services including patients from more "well-to-do families." MRT calls on officials to examine five years of family income data for long-term care applicants and to include spousal income in eligibility calculations for the program. The plan also seeks to save money limiting access to the personal care and assistance programs to more severely disabled New Yorkers, which could save \$154 million in the next fiscal year and \$360 million when fully implemented the following year. We urge pastors to pay close attention to these Medicaid proposals and advocate accordingly to stop potential cuts since they could have a devastating affect on parishioners in home bound situations or in nursing homes along with the finances of their families supporting them.

**Again, please review updates on the Medicaid crisis in our policy section and what you can do to stop proposed cuts to Medicaid in the state budget.**

## **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

With regard all housing and homeless concerns, be advised that housing courts are closed across the state indefinitely beginning on Tuesday, March 17. Be on the look out for anyone facing eviction or is precariously housed and act as best you can.

On March 19, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced 90 days of relief on mortgage payments for New Yorkers experiencing financial hardship. All New York mortgage servicers will be required to waive mortgage payments for individuals facing financial hardship, and may not make negative reports to credit bureaus, or charge late or online payment fees. The state is also postponing or suspending all foreclosures. Additionally, the Governor instructed the Department of Financial Services to require all state chartered banks to waive all ATM fees, late fees, overdraft fees, or fees for credit cards.

The Coalition for the Homeless is calling on the Department of Housing Services in New York City to make allowance for more private rooms for homeless people since having people sleep and gather in large congregate areas can facilitate spread of the virus. They have also called on the Federal Government for 5 billion in housing relief since there was no provision for housing assistance in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Read this article from Politico for more details.

The Covid-19 crisis highlights once again the limitations of our shelter system. This is why we strongly urge passage of the Home Stability Support which will keep people in their homes which is safer, more stable and less expensive than having to rely on homeless shelters. Please call the Governor and your Member of the Assembly and State Senator and urge them to pass Home Stability Support. Click here for our newsletter with more instructions on how to advocate.

**VOCAL-NY and allies released this open letter to Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo yesterday calling on them to protect homeless NYers amid COVID-19. Right now in shelters people are in crowded rooms with no major changes to sanitation or the ability to social distance. On the streets, people are running out of places to eat and shower.**

**We are hoping faith leaders can sign on to this letter by (Tues, 3/24) at 3:30PM by following this link to sign-on: <https://www.changethenypd.org/endorse-protect-homeless-covid-open-letter-cuomo-de-blasio>**

**Please boost tweets on social media and use the hashtags #HomelessCantStayHome and #ProtectHomelessFromCOVID.**

## **IMMIGRANTS**

Immigrants in your congregation and community might be particularly vulnerable. Speak forthrightly against any blame for the COVID19 crisis which might be placed on people because of their race, economic status or national origin. Ensure that everyone knows they can access free testing regardless of whether they have insurance. Comprehensive health care for undocumented immigrants is better in New York City by calling **311** but no one in any part of the state should be turned away for testing or have to bear any cost for that testing. The Families First Corona Virus Response Act does not allow for discrimination based on immigration status.

The New Sanctuary Coalition of New York is saying that thousands are still reporting to ICE, attending immigration hearings, and being detained in jails around the nation without access to necessary and proper health care and preventative equipment and measures. This week, ICE announced that they would be banning "social visitation" in detention facilities. This move will only further isolate human beings who should not be detained in the first place, keeping them from staying in touch with their loved ones.

Please go to New Sanctuary Coalition for more guidance and how you can help including offering accompaniment. The [Gothamist](#) is reporting increased encounters with ICE at airports where family are apprehended while delivering loved ones to the airport to return back to their countries of origin.

The New York Immigration Coalition has issued the following demands regarding the status of immigrants in light of the COVID Crisis.

Please be aware that many people in the gig economy, the self employed, and/or undocumented people do not have access to most of the benefits who come from state and Federal aid packages. The Council is ascertaining whether there is additional legislation that could be passed and whether there might also be a not-for-profit, church, and/or foundation response to help workers who fall through the cracks of the system.

**A third Federal stimulus bill continues to stall in the Senate. On March 20, we learned that the recent Federal legislation intended to provide sick leave, unemployment and other benefits along with additional stimulus in a third legislative package. explicitly excluded undocumented people. [Click here](#) to view a letter which was sent to Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Schumer on March 20 by a variety of organizations and faith leaders. If you did not sign the letter, you can still adapt it to your purposes and address it to additional people including Senate Majority Leader McConnell, House Minority Leader McCarthy, and your individual Congressperson. [Click here](#) for a quick sign on letter to advocate for immigrants as part of the bill. We also, again, strongly urge you to reach out to the immigrant residents in your community on whom you rely for many services to hear their story and ask how you can be of assistance including advocacy with your lawmakers.**

**New Sanctuary Coalition is a passionate faith-based advocate for immigrants. Here is a recent communique from Ravi Ragbir, Executive Director.**

*We don't have soap or cleaning supplies. We're locked in for over 18 hours a day. We're locked in rooms with people who are sick and have been in contact with people who've tested positive but they won't test us. We have no protection.*

*6 phones for 60 people and we're only allowed to call during 3 hours a day so there's always a crowd around the phones, they're not cleaned or disinfected between calls. They tested a few people with symptoms but sent them back in with us before the results came back and won't tell them what the results are.*

*They aren't giving us safety gear. They're not taking any tests or precautions. The officers aren't being tested. They're still bringing in new detainees from other states and other facilities in here with us. They're not testing them down in intake. Nobody feels safe in here at all.*

*I'm having chest pains I don't know what to do. Medical isn't doing anything because they don't have the training or test available. The staff don't care what happens to us. It's a few more people in here coughing and they still have them locked up in here with us. The unit flooded with brown water top and bottom floor and we were forced to clean it all with no protective gear. I need help*

*ICE is holding people whose only "crime" is the legal equivalent of forgetting to renew your driver's license in conditions that virtually guarantee that they will be infected with, suffer with, and potentially die from Covid-19.*

*I'm not going to sugarcoat this: these detention centers are going to become death camps.*

*The situation is so dire that detained Friends across the country are undertaking hunger strikes as a form of nonviolent protest. And in response, officers are menacing them with rifles, threatening them with isolation, removal of phone call rights, and deportation. Telling them that they will never see their homes or families again unless they give up their protest.*

*We at New Sanctuary Coalition will not rest until every Friend is released from detention. And we need your help to make that happen.*

*(1) Call your local representative and ask "What are you doing to protect people who are detained?"*

*(2) Call the jails and demand that they #FreeThemAll immediately.*

*(3) Call the airlines and demand that they stop transporting human beings for ICE.*

*(4) Donate to the L.I.F.E. Bond Fund – we have drained the bond fund to get our Friends out, and continue to bond Friends out as soon as new donations come in. The average bond right now is \$7,500. Every dollar you can spare helps.*

*(5) Donate to New Sanctuary – everything about Covid-19 has made our work more crucial,*



*and more complicated. We need your support now more than ever.*

*In solidarity,*

*Ravi Ragbir*

*p.s. -- NSC staff are working night and day to #FreeThemAll and to support our Friends outside of detention as well. Volunteers are the backbone of this effort, and there are many ways to help out from the safety of your home. [Click here](#) to explore opportunities and sign up!*

## **HELPING BUSINESSES**

Restrictions are being placed on local businesses and employers. Sports clubs, nightclubs, movie theaters, small theater houses and concert venues are closed. Cafes and bars are limited to take out only. Reach out to your local businesses and encourage people to patronize them to the degree that is possible given gathering restrictions.

## **COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**For college students, their dorms are closing and they are asked to go home. For international students, this might be difficult to do. Also be aware that some students may find themselves homeless. The Reverend Sandy Damhoff, Protestant Chaplain at University of Albany tells us that the vast majority went home with perhaps a few receiving an exemption for extenuating circumstances in the dorms while other are in off-campus apartments. There was a need for storage when students were given two weeks to get their stuff moved out. But now move-out is suspended until the "shelter in place" policy lifts. UHaul is providing one month free but they are among the most expensive companies so it's really not worth it if they have to pay for the rest of the months until they can return in the fall. If you have members in your parish who could offer free storage for college students in your garages or basements to not have to pay for self-storage, this could help. Universities should be reimbursing to students prorated amounts for room and board.**

**The state of New York has offered student loan relief up until April 30. [Read this article](#) for details on state assistance. In addition, there are various proposals circulating at Federal level to offer student loan relief as part of the stimulus package.**

## **EDUCATION, SCHOOL CLOSURES, ONLINE LEARNING, CHILD CARE**

Many of your parishioners will have to stay home with their children because school is closed. The Federal government offers up to 14 days of paid leave to allow parents to stay home with their kids. Be aware, however, that there may be need for child care and enrichment activities and that the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) has a lot of gaps in coverage. This

would be a good time to ask your legislator about child care and paid sick leave provisions in the state budget.

Reminder for NYC Public School Families: The New York City Department of Education (DOE) has launched a request form for parents whose kids need tablets to participate in remote learning – parents can fill out a form and submit to New York City Department of Education. For New York City parents whose students will be learning from home, can access a portal for remote learning resources from New York City Schools. Families can still pick up grab-and-go breakfast and lunch from any New York City school building between 7:30am-1:30pm tomorrow.

Pre-K Update: Given the uncertainty and upheaval COVID-19 has caused in all of our lives, New York City Department of Education has extended the deadline to apply for Pre-K through March 29, 2020. You can apply online at [WWW.myschools.nyc](http://WWW.myschools.nyc) or by calling 718-935-2009 (Monday-Friday, 8am-6pm)

The Albany City Schools have published this directive regarding grab and go lunches and others directives.

Churches, please reach out to your local school district and ask how you can help. Many school districts are providing take out breakfast and lunch. Again, your church might offer other kinds of food assistance and child care.

**The Alliance for Quality Education seeks restoration of Foundation Aid for schools to the tune of 4 billion. They sponsor everyday actions and daily 11AM Facebook Live and 4PM Instagram.**

## **HELPFUL WEBSITES AND ARTICLES**

### **1. Center for Disease Control**

Peter Gudaitis, Executive Director of New York Disaster Interfaith Services reminds us that the [\*\*Center for Disease Control Corona Virus website\*\*](#) – is the best source for up-to-date information and guidance.

### **2. State of New York Department of Health**

<https://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

### **3. Please contact your city and county health departments**

**4. Consult New York State Council of Churches at [WWW.Nyscoc.org](http://WWW.Nyscoc.org).** The website includes updates on the Corona Virus Response and Suggestions on how you can act on legislation. Locate your regional and national denominational websites. A listing of sites can be found at [WWW.Nyscoc.org](http://WWW.Nyscoc.org).

## 5. News Articles

[\*New York Times coronavirus coverage\*](#) has been removed from behind the *Times'* paywall, making it free for all readers.

["Covid-19 is not the flu. It's worse."](#) (Vox)

["Worried about coronavirus? If your loved one is over 60, read this."](#) (CNN)

["The Dos and Don'ts of 'Social Distancing.'"](#) (*The Atlantic*)

["How canceled events and self-quarantines save lives, in one chart."](#) (Vox)

["Here's how to avoid coronavirus scams."](#) (NBC News)

**State Senator Brad Hoylman and Assemblywoman Linda Ronsenthal held a virtual town hall on March 21 with health experts about COVID-19 and fielded questions from participants. [Click here](#) to see the 1 hour town hall on Facebook.**