

Ministry in a Time of a Pandemic Emergency in the Congregational Setting

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, ELCA
North Easton, Massachusetts
March 21, 2020

Rapid Respond and Preparedness Task Force

In order to make wise decisions based on science and fact concerning the welfare of our people, I formed the Rapid Response and Preparedness Task Force (when I heard about the first church in Easton to close) to advise the leadership of the church how best we can keep people safe. The task force consists of three nurses who rely on the CDC and the local health department for accurate information. The leadership of the church has followed every recommendation they have made in terms of when to cease worship, when to stop groups from using the building, how staff can continue to use the building when needed and how to safely deliver supplies to the homes of people in need. They will continue their advisory role throughout the emergency and no decisions will be made without their counsel.

Two New Ministries in Response to our New Reality

I. **Sherpherding Ministry** (Here's how we did it...)

- I called one of the leaders of our Stephen Ministry and asked her (named the **Lead Shepherd**) to take the lead in creating this ministry, and she contacted her co-leader who created the plan following my rough design.
- Since both have extensive knowledge and history with the congregation they formed groups of 3-4. (We call them **Flocks**.)
- Our priority was first to include the elderly and those with underlying health conditions but it now involves all in the congregation including many inactive members.
- The leaders of each group (we call them **Shepherds**) were first identified by recruiting Stephen Ministers who are well-trained for this very work. The leaders also include some council members and others in the congregation who heard about the ministry and volunteered.
- The Shepherds call each of their Flock at least twice a week. We asked them to include the following in their calls:
 - Checking in to ask how they are doing
 - Simply having conversation especially with those who are alone
 - Offering prayer and/or devotions
 - Asking about their needs including food, medicine, supplies and financial assistance

- i.e. our first request was for diapers, formula and wipes for a new born whose mother is unemployed and has run out of money. The request was made in the morning and by the end of the day someone from our Community Engagement Team made the delivery of a week's worth of supplies. That person consulted with and followed the safety guidelines given by our Rapid Response and Preparedness Task Force.
 - The leadership of the church is opening up some of our financial reserves to meet financial needs.
 - Each Shepherd knows to contact only the Lead Shepherd or the pastor about needs and concerns expressed to avoid mass email communication confusion.
 - The pastor is the Shepherd for each of the Shepherds. The pastor calls each Shepherd at least twice a week and follows the same protocol. (I am also calling those I know who are alone at least once a week to provide care which means that group of people are getting a call both from their Shepherd and the pastor.)
 - The pastor sent an announcement through the regular weekly church newsletter informing every one of the ministry, inviting anyone to become a Shepherd and asking about the needs of the people. Information received was directed back to the Lead Shepherd.

II. **Prayer Angel Ministry** (Here's how we did it.)

- Again, I called on the co-leaders of our Stephen Ministry to share with them a rough design of my idea. I suggested that we have an excellent and timely opportunity to strengthen our prayer ministry by doing something we can all do from our homes. This ministry has the potential to strengthen people's faith and demonstrate the power and solidarity of prayer. In addition, it is an effective way to discover people's needs.
- Here's the design:
 - Each Shepherd in the Shepherding Ministry who wants to be is also a **Prayer Angel**. They have agreed to pray each day following a suggested method:
 - Each week the Prayer Angels are given a form of prayer to follow. (The first is "Evening Prayer" from Sundays and Seasons which is brief and does not include music. The forms are being chosen by the Stephen Ministry co-leaders.)
 - The leaders are suggesting Bible verses to use as well each day.

- The prayer list includes those normally on our congregational prayer list and the growing number of people and concerns directly related to the pandemic. (Each day this list grows as word gets out and the list includes many family and friends of members who have no formal relationship with the church.)
- Each week the co-leaders send out a prayer theme chosen by them for each day. For example, here's Week I:
 - **Monday** - Prayers for all Medical Personnel, doctors, nurses, in the front lines managing patients with Covid 19 as they are housed in hospitals, tents, drive by testing sites etc.
 - **Tuesday** - Prayers for Pastors, Priests, Imams, Rabbis, Bishops, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, mental health care workers in their new circumstances to nurture those who are hurting and afraid.
 - **Wednesday** - Grocery store workers, clerks, those who stock the shelves, unpack trucks, truck drivers, pharmacy workers, those who retrieve carriages from parking lots, baggers who meet hundreds of folks every day and hope not to be infected.
 - **Thursday** - Those who live in fear of losing their jobs, their small savings that will be depleted quickly, those who fear losing their education, their health, their place of worship.
 - **Friday** - Other health care workers for veterans, home care nurses, CNAs, workers in assisted living places, nursing homes, dentists, and dental assistants, veterinarians, hospice workers and those who do the cleaning and the cooking in all of these institutions.
 - (Saturday will eventually be included and on Sunday everyone gets the Sunday worship liturgy, sermon and prayers from the pastor.)
- The pastor sent out a message to the entire congregation through our newsletter informing them of the Prayer Angel Ministry, and the entire list of prayer requests will be sent to all weekly.

- As word gets out people are volunteering to be Prayer Angels. Those names are sent directly to the co-leaders who integrate them into the ministry.

I hope this information is helpful to you. If I can be of any assistance, please call or write.

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