Joint message for faith communities from the Shelby County Health Department and Church Health

Prepared on March 17, 2020

People at the highest risk of infection are:
• Age 60 or older
• People with COPD, asthma, emphysema, lung disease, diabetes, heart disease and those who are immunosuppressed

COVID-19 is twice as contagious as the flu, and the mortality rate is 10 times that of flu. That means it is ten times more lethal. There is now evidence that mildly symptomatic individuals can spread the virus.

Anyone who has a fever or a persistent, new and unexplained cough needs to stay home. People experiencing symptoms should call a health care provider for advice. We are still in the midst of flu season and actively testing for Flu A. Locally, 6 percent of primary care visits are presenting with symptoms. We believe these are a mix of Flu and COVID-19.

The best way to protect parishioners is to keep them out of harm’s way because there is no anti-viral treatment or vaccine yet. Conducting any programming possible virtually, or suspending, will protect the most vulnerable.

We recognize this is challenging, particularly with Holy Week approaching, but our local health experts believe this is the only way to protect their community. As faith communities, it is part of our calling to support the wider community. This is how the community currently needs support.

The CDC’s guidance is to limit gatherings to under 50 people and the White House recommends canceling or postponing in-person events that consist of 10 people or more. Our local health authorities are depending on the wisdom and prudence of faith community leaders to follow these guidelines and suspend all in-person gatherings.

COVID-19 Resources
Congregations often first hear that our friends or church family members are sick through the congregational prayer chain, emails, or exchanging information on Sunday mornings. At a time when many members may be anxious about the potential impact of COVID-19, congregations can offer trustworthy information when questions arise and also help to slow the transmission of the virus. Church Health works closely with public health experts and health care partners to ensure we have the most reliable and current information available for our partners in faith:

Websites:
Shelby County Health Department
shelbytnhealth.com
Center for Disease Control: cdc.gov
Tennessee Department of Health: tn.gov/health.html

For more information, please contact Church Health’s Faith Community Engagement office at fce@churchhealth.org or visit ChurchHealth.org.