

Public Health
277 Victoria Street
5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1W2

toronto.ca/health

March 20, 2020

Dear Faith Community Leaders:

Re: Further Clarification on Recommendation to Suspend Faith Services

Yesterday, I sent you an email recommending that you **suspend all regular services and gatherings** for the time being. I want to provide further clarification to my comments on gatherings of 50 people or less as we have had many follow up questions and concerns.

First, I want to emphasize that at this time, **social distancing is absolutely critical** to reducing the spread of COVID-19, especially to those who are elderly or have pre-existing health conditions. I am sure you have many people in your community who fall into these categories. At this time, we are asking people to stay home to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, and if they have to go out we are asking that they carefully follow our [social distancing](#) recommendations. This includes staying two metres (six feet) from others at all times.

In many faith-based settings, it will not be practical to accommodate this social distancing measure. **If you cannot meet the social distancing recommendations, please cancel your services.** We appreciate that many people are anxious or afraid, and are turning to you as faith leaders, and to their faith community for support. I am asking you to consider other options to provide support, and to encourage your community members to stay home.

I know that many of you are implementing other options such as televised or video-taped services that are offered online or through social media. Others are calling community members to offer spiritual support by telephone. It is inspiring to see this leadership by faith leaders across our city, and I know it is very much appreciated by your members.

This is an unprecedented time, and I know that some of the measures we are instituting are challenging and stressful to some. We all have a role to play in reducing the spread of COVID-19, and I thank you for all that you are doing. Please continue to stay informed through our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19. If you have any further questions, please email us at publichealth@toronto.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eille".

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Medical Officer of Health