



## **Six ways Religious and Traditional Actors can take action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus in their communities**

*In the unprecedented time of the global pandemic of COVID-19 virus, also known as corona virus, religious and faith-based institutions, actors and teachings can positively contribute to preventing the spread of the virus and serve as a source of comfort and stability. Religious and traditional actors are frequently well-positioned to respond and communicate information and teachings to their communities in times of crisis. The following recommendations for religious and traditional actors are developed to mitigate community vulnerability and increase resilience.*

### **Communicate Timely Information**

Countries around the world are enacting strict measures to reduce the probability of an individual contracting the disease or spreading it to others. Disinformation and rumors related to spread of the virus and preventative measures can be harmful if followed by members of any community. As such, community leaders should maintain a viable communication line with government authorities to ensure they have accurate information regarding the pandemic and preventative measures. Moreover, they should encourage their community to listen to the safety guidelines promoted by their respective governments and the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone. Religious leaders and communities can maintain constant communication via online platforms, such as Facebook and email.

### **Engage with Youth**

Global leaders have called for social distancing. As such, we must use new methods to support our community members and maintain lines of communication. Youth have been at the forefront as users of social media and technology. As modern technology is still a recent development, religious and traditional leaders may not have a concrete understanding on how to use technological platforms to communicate with a wide audience. In addition, messages developed and communicated by young people are more likely to resonate with their peers. Therefore, communities and leaders should seek to actively partner with youth in developing messages, assisting with the utilization of technology and social media as a connective communication mechanism during this period of social distancing. Young women and men of faith play an important role in connecting with their peers and communities at large.

### **Promote unity and empathy in times of crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the spread of xenophobic and discriminatory attacks towards specific groups and communities. Religious and Community leaders should promote messages of unity and discuss with community members the importance of preventing the social stigma of people and groups. Encourage community members to show empathy with others and understand the virus itself. Ensure all messaging is thoughtful and intentional.

### **Guide your community on safe religious practices**

As we are practicing social distancing, communities should call on religious leaders and actors to re-examine religious rituals and practices in order to minimize risks of transmission of the virus. Moreover, hygiene is emphasized in every faith; hence, religious leaders should utilize its teachings

to educate the community on the importance of sanitation and hygiene. [The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) emphasizes the importance of hygiene, such as frequently washing hands with warm water and soap, to help prevent the spread of the virus.

### **Support Your Neighbour**

Religious teachings encourage us to be kind and supportive of our neighbors. While practicing social distancing, religious organizations, big or small, can provide resources to help the community, especially the most vulnerable. Work to ensure that children, immuno-compromised, and the elderly have access to proper nutrition, healthcare and necessary medication. Encourage those at lower risk to help with grocery shopping and picking up medicines and supplies for elderly and immunocompromised community members. Social distancing can still be maintained by leaving supplies at entryways for those in need.

### **Continue to serve the community**

Above all else, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other sacred spaces, must continue to serve the community. Prayer services and rituals are important for people to connect with their faith. Maintaining a modified routine creates a needed sense of continuation and stability in face of many changes in our ordinary life. Faith is an important support and coping mechanism, especially in a time of crisis and uncertainty. While public worship sessions are temporarily discouraged, religious institutions should seek to find new ways of providing their services. This can be done by utilizing technology, such as Facebook or YouTube, to live-stream prayer services. Radio is also an efficient way of reaching out to the community and sharing vital information to wide community audience.

*These are unsettling times; prayer and moral support are critical to the well-being of the believer. We should all encourage social unity through a common purpose. We should seek our neighbour to share resources and amplify our common efforts as human beings regardless of lines of division in the past. Consider partnering with other community or faith-organizations if you do not have access to technology.*