

URC looks ahead – in case swine flu closes churches

The United Reformed Church has looked ahead to actions local churches should take if, as predicted, Swine Flu becomes more virulent and widespread during the autumn. It is suggested that it would be good for congregations to think now about how they will seek to maintain fellowship and encourage members to maintain a worshipping life, if the prevalence of the illness reaches a point where public assembly is discouraged or prohibited.

The Revd Craig Bowman, Secretary for Ministries, who drew together the document with contributions from colleagues, said: "Much of this will seem like common sense and may simply reflect what is normal practice in many places, but sometimes we need to be reminded of the importance of good practice."

Suggestions include:

- Forgoing the usual handshakes by welcoming stewards before a service, and by the preacher afterwards. Smiles and words of greeting might suffice.
- Using glasses rather than a common cup and pre-cut pieces of bread rather than a loaf from which worshippers tear a portion at communion services.
- If services cannot be held, ministers and elders could keep in touch with members by telephone. Those churches who have members with good IT skills might be able to organise their own internet worship and times of fellowship.

Local churches might also set up a neighbourhood visiting rota to check whether people need help with shopping.

Guidance for churches: [the full document](#)

There are a number of websites giving specific further information:

The government has published 'Faith Communities and Pandemic Flu: Guidance for faith communities and local influenza pandemic committees'

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/influenzapandemic>

A Church of England summary of the document appears at

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/swineflu/governmentadvice.doc>

The Methodist Church has produced guidance

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openogod.content&cmid=2684>

The Church of England has published prayers for individual and group use.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/prayers/#swineflu>

More general information can be found on the Directgov and NHS websites.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177831 and www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

The NHS advice is available in other languages. <http://www.nhs.uk:80/Conditions/Pandemic-flu/Pages/Otherlanguages.aspx>

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