



Edition 1: April 2020

Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Campaign

**Reference Document for  
Religious Leaders and Faith  
Communities Guidance**

## **Table of Contents**

[Preamble](#)

### **JOINT STATEMENT FROM UNICEF AND RELIGIONS FOR PEACE**

[Overview of the document](#)

#### **1. Introduction: What are the roles of communities of faith and religious leaders in effective communication, preparedness, and response for COVID-19?**

[Key issues](#)

[How religious leaders and communities can engage](#)

#### **2. Dispelling stigma, countering false information, and upholding rights**

[Key issues](#)

[How religious leaders and communities can engage](#)

#### **3. Religious gatherings and adaptations of rituals**

[Key issues](#)

[How religious leaders and communities can engage](#)

[Guidance on religious gatherings](#)

[Guidance on adaptation of rituals](#)

[Funerals and Burial](#)

[Guidance on alternatives to in-person worship and other practices](#)

#### **4. Spiritual well-being, resilience, empathy, and community service**

[Key issues](#)

[How religious leaders and communities can engage](#)

[Mental and Spiritual Health](#)

[Supporting Neighbors and Serving the Community](#)

#### **5. People facing vulnerabilities, including violence and with a focus on children and families**

[Key issues](#)

[How religious leaders and communities can engage](#)

[People facing vulnerabilities](#)

[Focus on Children and Families](#)

[Violence](#)

[Gender-based violence](#)

[Violence Against Children](#)

[Child and Youth Protection and Participation](#)

#### **Where to go for further information/links to resources**

[General](#)

[What are the roles of communities of faith and religious leaders in effective communication, preparedness, and response for COVID-19?](#)

[Dispelling stigma, countering false information, and upholding rights](#)

[Religious gatherings and adaptations of rituals](#)

[Spiritual well-being, resilience, empathy, and community service](#)

[People facing vulnerabilities, including violence and with a focus on children and families](#)

**NB: This is a living document. It is up-to-date as of April 2020. We expect that new resources will be issued and can be used in addition to this document in the future. This document was produced in a short time as a reference guide, but has not been fully edited. Please excuse typographical errors. This is the source document for a series of guides for religious leaders and faith communities in the Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative with UNICEF and Religions for Peace, which will be released late April/May 2020. Please contact JLI for further information on these guides.**

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# Preamble

## The Global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative

### Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities

#### **JOINT STATEMENT FROM UNICEF AND RELIGIONS FOR PEACE<sup>1</sup>**

NEW YORK, 7 April 2020 – The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with an unprecedented global challenge, touching every community in every nation of the world. The pandemic is causing systems of work, education, finance and domestic lives to grind to a halt, affecting nearly every aspect of people's lives.

As the pandemic continues wreaking unimaginable sickness and increasing death tolls, we are particularly aware of the increased vulnerability of children, families and in particular girls. Children are facing a range of challenges to their health and safety: school closures, high levels of emotional distress, higher risks of violence and increased food insecurity. We are also seeing an increase in the number of orphans and in the incidence of other diseases due to the break in vaccination services. And we are seeing a growing need for financial and material support for households hardest hit by loss of income and resulting strains.

Today, as multitudes prepare for diverse religious observances (including Passover, Easter, Ramadan and Vaisakhi (Vesak) and Ridván), Religions for Peace (RfP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are joining forces to launch a global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action Covid-19 Initiative to raise awareness of the impacts of this pandemic on the world's youngest citizens.

The Initiative reflects the unique and critical roles played by religious leaders and actors, in influencing values, attitudes, behaviours and actions that affect the development and wellbeing of the world's children. The Initiative will be coordinated by the global partnership on Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities, which involves Religions for Peace's Interreligious Councils, including senior leaders of the world's religious and spiritual traditions - Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Jewish, Sikh, Zoroastrian and Indigenous spirituality. It also includes interfaith youth and women's networks, in collaboration with the Joint Learning Initiative of Local Faith Communities (JLI) with its membership of International Faith-Based organizations.

This global partnership now commits to strengthening multi-religious action and community mobilization, in countering the COVID-19 pandemic. The global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/launch-global-multi-religious-faith-action-covid-19-initiative>

Covid-19 Initiative calls upon all communities across the world, together with governments, UN entities, and broad civil society organisations, to join forces to:

#### ADAPT

...Faith gatherings, rituals and services in keeping with the RfP-ACT Alliance Statement and WHO Guidance on religious mass gatherings, burials and rituals, to:

- Honour international and national health authorities' guidance on public gatherings, physical distancing and other critical matters of public health related to faith community gatherings, services and rituals such as funerals, marriages and births for the health and safety of religious followers while developing alternative pastoral approaches.

#### PROMOTE

...Heightened focus on hygiene and sanitation in keeping with religious teachings and sacred texts that emphasize cleanliness as an element of holiness.

...Listening to children and families, through organized spaces for dialogue on-line, through media and where permitted house-to-house, and within small group fora (keeping distance).

...Intergenerational dialogue to give voice to girls, boys together with parents and communities to find solutions to issues surrounding the epidemic.

...Voices of faith and wider community engagement to inform local responses as well as national policy-making and programmes.

#### COUNTER

...All forms of stigma and discrimination associated with transmission of the disease with active promotion of attitudes and behaviours to uphold the dignity and rights of all people.

#### PROVIDE

...Active engagement of networks of religious communities including faith-based women, and youth, in collaboration with local governance structures, to provide organized voluntary services in:

- Spiritual and emotional care and support for parents, children, the elderly and those experiencing disruption and distress in order to provide a source of support, peace, comfort and hope.
- Positive age-specific and gender-responsive parenting guidance and support to families in relation to the health, development, protection and social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people, particularly those in low-income families and those most vulnerable and hardest to reach.
- Youth-friendly communication and engagement including their support with more systematic use of technology and social media as a connective communication platform for communities during periods of physical distancing and beyond.
- We stand united in this global Inter-faith moment of hope and solidarity for the survival, protection and development of our children, families and communities.

## Overview of the document

**The purpose of the document is to equip religious leaders and communities of faith and those partnering with these groups** with evidence-based guidance and information. It is the reference document for more targeted guidance documents that will be produced as part of the Multi-religious Faith in Action COVID-19 Initiative with RfP and UNICEF. The aim of the initiative is to provide guidance on many areas affecting children, families and communities at large. This initial version of the document provides guidance across five key areas:

1. Role of religious leaders in effective communication, education, preparedness, and response
2. Dispelling stigma, countering false information, and upholding rights
3. Safe religious gatherings and adaptations of rituals
4. Promoting spiritual well-being, resilience, empathy, and community service
5. Protecting people facing vulnerabilities, including violence against children, refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities

### How it is Organized

Each section is split into three areas: 1) an overview of the key issues and topics to help orient religious leaders and communities of faith to areas of concern; 2) a section detailing specific actions to address the problems; 3) a section with faith-specific examples or religious teachings 4) a section with links to other resources from several religious traditions and public health sources.

### How it Was Prepared

This guidance document draws on an analysis of more than 150 resources on preparedness and response to COVID-19. This includes both official guidance from WHO, UNICEF and IFRC as well as faith-specific guidance prepared by Faith Based organizations. The review also included numerous resources from Faith Based about faith and Ebola, HIV, Malaria, Gender, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH). We have tried to use the most up-to-date and detailed resources, but we have not been able to comprehensively cover every document, from every religious tradition, and from every country. **This is a guidance document and it is expected that the suggestions in this document will need to be adapted for the differing needs of specific local and faith contexts, as well as in case of new guidance issued by health authorities. This is a living document. It is up-to-date as of April 2020 and we expect that new resources will be issued and can be used in addition to this document in the future.**

The document has been prepared by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) in close collaboration with *Religion for Peace's* International Review Committee, composed of the senior most religious leaders and scholars from the world's diverse faith traditions, key Faith-based organisations advisers from JLI's member organisations with UNICEF communication for development and programme specialists.

The **Global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative** was officially launched on 7 April 2020 through the joint statement by UNICEF ED, Henrietta Fore and 12 senior most religious leaders from *Religions for Peace*, representing all major religious and spiritual traditions.<sup>2</sup> Partners committed to building multi-religious action and community mobilization, in countering the COVID-19 pandemic. The Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative is part of UNICEF's Faith

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/launch-global-multi-religious-faith-action-covid-19-initiative>

and Positive Change for Children (FPCC) Global Initiative on Social Behaviour Change, which aims to strengthen collaboration with faith communities to achieve social behaviour change.

The Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities Global Initiative underlines **the need for collaborative and equitable engagement between UNICEF and faith communities. The Initiative highlights that development and faith partners hold complementary skills and that cooperation should engage the mind and heart to achieve social and behavioural change, integrating scientific evidence, religious teachings, and time for reflection.**

# 1. Introduction: What are the roles of communities of faith and religious leaders in effective communication, preparedness, and response for COVID-19?

## Key issues

Communities of faith and religious leaders have a key role to play in promoting positive behaviour and beliefs in times of crisis. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, there have been reports of tensions between religious worldviews and scientific, medical advice relating to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> These reports cite prominent religious leaders in several countries who frame COVID-19 as being sent by evil forces, or as a punishment sent by God for sin and disobedience.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, most religious leaders and communities of faith are leading the way in finding new ways to serve, unite, and stem the spread of the virus.<sup>5</sup>

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many international Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are already mobilising their existing partnerships with local religious leaders, women and youth leaders and other community networks to respond to COVID-19, building on their experiences of responding to previous epidemics. A great number of individuals and networks within communities of faith are also taking action and finding ways to support vulnerable people through the emergency.<sup>6</sup> Religious leaders and communities can effectively advocate and take action to avoid scapegoating and build harmony in society during this time of heightened stress and tensions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E.g Global Voices, Across Africa, COVID-19 heightens tensions between faith and science, 25 March 2020.

<https://globalvoices.org/2020/03/25/across-africa-covid-19-heightens-tension-between-faith-and-science/>

<sup>4</sup>E.g The Times of Israel, Israeli rabbi: coronavirus outbreak is divine punishment for gay pride parades, 8 March 2020.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-rabbi-blames-coronavirus-outbreak-on-gay-pride-parades/?fbclid=IwAR3YwkkajgHRMonffwudWKfQGsOTcOCbEPCRIUv71Ec-zmTtkOM9G7vEYM>

E.g Pulse, CAN President says sin, disobedience to God responsible for Coronavirus, 23 March 2020.

<https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/can-president-says-sin-disobedience-to-god-responsible-for-coronavirus/z1ljqtf>

<sup>5</sup> E.g L'Express, Catholiques, juifs, musulmans...les religions s'organisent face confinement, 18 March 2020.

[https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/religion/catholiques-juifs-musulmans-les-religions-s-organisent-face-au-confinement\\_2121203.html](https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/religion/catholiques-juifs-musulmans-les-religions-s-organisent-face-au-confinement_2121203.html)

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Vatican News, "The women religious on the frontline." <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-03/coronavirus-women-religious-nurses-prayers-italy.html>;

Chicago Tribune, "Muslim youth group offers grocery delivery to the area's elderly during coronavirus pandemic."

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/morton-grove/ct-mqc-mosque-volunteers-tl-0326-20200320-gmasztqpfjgipk75cnfqv5o7rm-story.html>

<sup>7</sup> E.g. UN, Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.

<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Plan%20of%20Action%20Advanced%20Copy.pdf>

Lessons from other pandemics and diseases, such as Ebola, Zika, Malaria, and HIV, confirm the game-changing roles that local religious leaders and communities play in the fight against their spread. For example, in the Ebola response in West Africa, there was a significant change in behaviour within communities towards safe, as well as religiously and culturally accepted practices, through the advocacy of local religious leaders, which helped stem the spread of the Ebola disease. Religious leaders are highly trusted by local communities, can often reach individuals and populations that are at risk of being left behind and can therefore complement and reinforce the work of national authorities and global public health organizations.

This first, introductory section provides an initial overview of the significant and distinctive roles that religious leaders and communities can play in countering the spread, and negative impact, of COVID-19. The following sections then go into detail on adapting religious gatherings and practices, spiritual and mental support, serving your community, responses for people facing specific vulnerabilities, including children and families, and countering stigma and false information.

Religious leaders and communities of faith must be empowered to lead responsibly and calmly in this time of global disruption. Overall, religious leaders and communities of faith can help make changes in society and the way that people think and behave in relation to COVID-19. The most important ways in which religious leaders and communities of faith can help make social and behavioural changes are as follows:

- Preserve human dignity and protect the sanctity of life through effectively communicating and promoting responsible behaviours:
  - Educate the public to reinforce existing positive and change/adapt inadequate attitudes and practices associated with key preventive measures, such as handwashing, physical distancing, and staying at home
  - Adapt theologies and religious practices for the present times, considering three principles for adaptations of practices: accessibility, availability and affordability
  - Promote the agency of individuals and communities to make meaningful choices, based on the best information possible<sup>8</sup>
- Shape social values and deliver messages of hope:
  - Advocate for positive attitudes, opinions, policies, and laws that proactively help those most in need
  - Help to shift negative attitudes from marginalised groups and promote equal opportunities and solidarity rather than pity and hostility
  - Promote social harmony and counter scapegoating/discriminatory tensions that blame others for the virus, including through building harmony across religions and denominations
- Mobilise each other to take action:

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Religions for Peace, Handbook for Religions Leaders on HIV and AIDS Advocacy & Media Relation. <http://rfp.makerepeat.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/HIV-and-AIDS-Advocacy-Media-Relations-Handbook-for-Religious-Leaders.pdf>

- Mobilise communities of faith and action at all levels; grassroots, national and international<sup>9</sup>
- Mobilise financial, spiritual, and human resources (volunteers) to rally behind the cause of stopping the spread of the virus
- Identify and reach out to the most disadvantaged families and individuals in their communities who might need specific support in this difficult time, e.g families of children with disabilities, families who have lost their sources of income

## How religious leaders and communities can engage

### Effectively Communicating Accurate Information

- Religious and community leaders can embrace the responsibility to communicate messages from health authorities and be a source of reliable information to their communities
  - *Example: Episcopal Relief and Development “During disasters and epidemics, remember this acronym: C.I.A.–Community, Information and Agency. As church and community leaders, support your community and maintain connection throughout the event, provide your community with verified information about the health and safety implications of the event and then allow them to decide what’s best for them.”*
- Religious and community leaders are encouraged to commit to sourcing their information from WHO, UNICEF, and their national authorities, and to communicate the information responsibly so as not to spread panic.
- Religious and community leaders are encouraged to consider ways to communicate with diverse groups and tailor information for different groups. Technology-based solutions are recommended, given the need for social distancing and to limit face-to-face interactions. This includes use of mobile phones (voice calls, short message services), social media platforms (like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Weibo and others) or messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Viber, etc.). Interactive radio, video and TV programmes may also be considered, as appropriate.
- Not everyone’s information needs are the same, (e.g. some marginalised groups, such as persons with intellectual disabilities who will need information in easy-to-read formats).<sup>10</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic also requires a variety of technological engagements, according to what people have access to and what they can use. Some people will want to use social media, some people will use phone calls and SMS, some people will use their radios, and so on.

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<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, What Religious Leaders Can Do About HIV/AIDS.

[https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Religious\\_leaders\\_Aids.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Religious_leaders_Aids.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>To learn more please see UNICEF, COVID-19 Guidance: Engaging Children and Adults with Disabilities in Risk Communications. [https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19\\_engagement\\_children\\_and\\_adults\\_with\\_disabilities\\_final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19_engagement_children_and_adults_with_disabilities_final.pdf).

- Example: For communications, the following methods are suggested:
  - “Communications Strategy Examples (From Preparing you church for coronavirus)<sup>11</sup>
  - *Text Messaging: This service uses less bandwidth than cell phone calls, and many text messaging servers will continuously attempt to send the message until the cellular signal is restored.*
  - *Text Broadcasting: Now is the time to implement group messaging services so you can broadcast text messaging alerts during crisis situations.*
  - *Social Media Networking Communications: Examples of how social media can be used before or during public health crises include posting communications, sharing information, downloading resources, updating news, sharing geographical location, and taking or sharing pictures of developing events. To stay consistent and current in an emergency, follow your [national and local public health authority, as well as UNICEF and WHO], on social media and use their messages during an emergency.*
  - *Call-Down Procedure (Phone Tree): Clergy calls assigned congregational leaders, congregational leaders call assigned congregation members, congregation members call assigned congregation members, and so on. This system should include everyone who needs information, but especially individuals at risk.*
  - *Prepare for Media Engagement: It would also be wise to decide in advance if and how you might work with media if they contact you about how your church is navigating COVID-19.”*
- Religious and community leaders can draw on religious texts and teachings to support them in delivering information to their communities and discover ways to bring information from health sciences together with religious teachings. It is an important tenet of many faiths to value knowledge and education, and religious texts often include teachings on the importance of taking care of one’s body, including through hygiene and other prevention practices:

*Religious teachings that align with recommended practices for the prevention of COVID-19*

- “[t]he Bible explains that knowledge and education about diseases can help us learn how to avoid them and the lack of knowledge can lead us to death: ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.’” (Hosea 4:6)<sup>12</sup>
- “Islam puts great emphasis on education, which consists of teaching and helping people to understand [viruses], [their] consequences, how [they are] spread, and how to prevent [their] transmission”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wheaton College Humanitarian Disaster Institute, Preparing Your Church for Coronavirus (COVID-19): a Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and Faith-Based Planning Manual. <https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Christians and Muslims Promoting Maternal and Infant Health. A Sermon/Khutbah Guide for Rwanda. Christian version. [https://imaworldhealth.org/ai\\_file\\_subscribe/file/3210](https://imaworldhealth.org/ai_file_subscribe/file/3210)

<sup>13</sup> Christians and Muslims Promoting Maternal and Infant Health. A Sermon/Khutbah Guide for Rwanda. Muslim version. [https://imaworldhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Rwanda\\_Muslim\\_Khutbah\\_Sermon\\_Guide\\_-\\_English.pdf](https://imaworldhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Rwanda_Muslim_Khutbah_Sermon_Guide_-_English.pdf)

- “Talmudic guidance... cautions against the danger of transporting disease from one place to another (Taanit 21b); affirms the need to stay at home at a time of plague and maintain social distancing (Bava Kama 60b, Ketubot 77b); and also provides strict guidelines for maintaining hygiene, especially the importance of regular washing of hands and feet (Shabbat 108b). During the cholera pandemic of 1826 to 1837 across Europe and beyond, one of the most noted rabbinical authorities of his time, Rabbi Akiva Eiger of Posen (Poznan), issued a ruling to minimize social contact and reduce prayer minyanim to small groups (of no more than fifteen) ,and even supported law enforcement for such steps. He urged Jewish communities to be scrupulous about hygiene, specifically mentioning regular washing of hands and face; and above all he demanded that all behaviour should be in accordance with the guidance of medical experts whose recommendations must be followed to the letter (Chidushei Rak”a, Nedarim 39).”
- “The mindful hand-washing helps to make us more careful and gives us more opportunities to be mindful in our daily lives.” Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo, a respected monk in the Theravada forest tradition.<sup>14</sup>
- “Whatever competent physicians or surgeons prescribe for a patient should be accepted and complied with, provided that they are adorned with the ornament of justice. If they were to be endued with divine understanding, that would certainly be preferable and more desirable.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Baha’l tradition, translated from the Persian)
- “All faiths compel us to protect lives and to acknowledge and honor the divine breath within each person and in one another.”<sup>15</sup>

- Especially in contexts of political instability, religious leaders and communities are encouraged to treat all people equally and deliver messages countering scapegoating mechanisms and tensions along religious and ethnic lines between and within communities that can generate or worsen during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. When viable, interreligious initiatives are particularly significant in fostering social harmony.
  - Children and youth can be at the center of interreligious and anti-discrimination approaches. Arigatou International’s Messages and Actions to Ensure Children’s Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic<sup>16</sup> call for religious leaders to counter xenophobic and scapegoating tendencies that might arise/be revived in

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Christians and Muslims Promoting Maternal and Infant Health. A Sermon/Khutbah Guide for Rwanda. Christian version. [https://imaworldhealth.org/ai\\_file\\_subscribe/file/3210](https://imaworldhealth.org/ai_file_subscribe/file/3210)

<sup>14</sup> Available at: <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/senior-thai-monk-offers-a-buddhist-perspective-on-dealing-with-covid-19>

<sup>15</sup> <https://rfp.org/a-joint-statement-urgent-action-needed-to-prevent-covid-19/>

<sup>16</sup> Arigatou International, Faith in Action for Children: 12 Messages and Actions to Ensure Children’s Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/response-to-covid19#posters>

emergency settings through making sure information delivered to children do not contain discriminatory or stigmatizing messages

- There are several resources that religious leaders, FBOs and communities of faith can use to support their social cohesion and interreligious work. For example, World Vision International, in collaboration with Islamic Relief, have developed a manual for Muslim and Christian religious leaders and FBO staff to learn about Do No Harm principles and to approach peacubuilding in connection with religious texts.<sup>17</sup>

## Prepare, coordinate, and collaborate

- **Plan and Prepare: Religious leaders can work to develop a strategy to respond to COVID-19 and strengthen their preparedness.** Appropriate planning and organisation between religious leaders and their communities of faith is encouraged. These can be developed remotely and should always be done in observance of national and local authorities' regulations.
  - *Example: Religious leaders' strategies in response to COVID-19 can include a number of measures to prepare them and their communities of faith. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has created a Preparedness for Pandemics resource<sup>18</sup> which includes advice on creating a task force to coordinate the church's response within the community, create a plan for ministry continuation, community outreach, and respond to new needs as they arise. Wheaton College has a manual<sup>19</sup> for preparing a church for COVID-19. Their advice includes:*
    - *get organized,*
    - *create a health team,*
    - *develop a communications strategy,*
    - *focus on church and community outreach (observing necessary physical distancing),*
    - *strengthen preparedness through collaboration and*
    - *adapt to changing needs.*
- **Religious leaders, communities of faith, and faith-based organisations are encouraged to reach out to current and potential partners in their communities to develop an integrated, community-wide approach** in the time of COVID-19, and to hold governments and donors to account through advocacy campaigns and initiatives. For example, religious leaders and communities of faith can reach out to the following groups:
  - *Multi-religious: Other denominations and faiths to organise efforts together<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> World Vision International, Do No Harm for Faith Groups: Christian-Muslim Edition.

<https://www.wvi.org/peacebuilding-and-conflict-sensitivity/publication/do-no-harm-faith-groups-christian-muslim-edition>

<sup>18</sup> Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Preparedness for Pandemics <https://pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/disease-guidance-for-congregations/>

<sup>19</sup> Wheaton College Humanitarian Disaster Institute, Preparing Your Church for Coronavirus (COVID-19): a Step-by-Step, Research-Informed and Faith-Based Planning Manual. <https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> E.g. UNICEF, Religious and inter-religious organizations, networks and alliances. [https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index\\_60231.html](https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60231.html)

- Existing non-governmental organisations partners, including those that are faith-based and non-faith based partners
- Local community based organizations, such as those helping children or those helping people living on the street, and organizations of Persons with Disabilities that will provide support on ensuring messages are developed in accessible formats and help to reach persons with disabilities (see section on people facing vulnerabilities)
- International, National and local public health authorities and health services
- UNICEF Country Offices
- Religions for Peace Interreligious Councils (IRCs)
- Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) national groups<sup>21</sup>
- Link to UNICEF's Faith and Positive Change for Children<sup>22</sup> Global Initiative
  - Example: Work between FBOs and religious leaders: Strengthening the capacity of religious leaders has been successful in changing behaviours that spread viruses and disease in the past. Islamic Relief and CAFOD delivered a number of interfaith initiatives against Ebola, where they trained religious leaders to deliver key messages about washing, not shaking hands and reporting sickness<sup>23</sup>.
- Example: IMA World Health has announced a partnership with the African Christian Health network (ACHAP)<sup>24</sup> to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in DRC, Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. The partnership will focus on communication and education strategies engaging religious leaders, schools and churches; dissemination of context-relevant guidelines and best practices; enhancing mechanisms of referral and tracing in the communities; implementation of prevention and protection measures such as hand-washing stations.
- Example: World Vision International have developed a model called Citizen Voice and Action<sup>25</sup> to improve access to services for and reduce inequality among children through enhancing social accountability mechanisms, especially towards national authorities in fragile contexts.
- Example: the Sant'Egidio Community publicly supported<sup>26</sup> the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' appeal<sup>27</sup> to the G20 members for a debt relief and other financial measures to tackle the COVID-19-generated crisis in Africa in particular.
- **Religious leaders are encouraged to work with government authorities, both local and national, and health professionals to discuss adaptations to religious practices and gatherings in contextually relevant ways** (see section on adaptations to gatherings and practices for specific recommendations on adaptations)
  - There is much precedent for religious leaders stepping up to help advise authorities and work collaboratively to find the best ways to make adaptations. During the 2016 Ebola

<sup>21</sup> GNRC Secretariat: [gncr@arigatouinternational.org](mailto:gncr@arigatouinternational.org)

<sup>22</sup> <https://jiflc.com/fpcc/>

<sup>23</sup> Islamic Relief Worldwide, Faith Leaders and the Fight Against Ebola, <https://www.islamic-relief.org/faith-leaders-and-the-fight-against-ebola/>

<sup>24</sup> ACHAP is the 43 Christian health associations and FBOs operating in 32 African countries. <http://www.achap.org/>

<sup>25</sup> World Vision International, Citizen Voice and Action Model <https://www.wvi.org/meero/publication/citizen-voice-and-action-model>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.santegidio.org/pagelD/30284/langID/de/itemID/35388/Covid-19-Sant-Egidio-unterst%C3%BCtz-den-Vorschlag-von-Guterres-von-einem-Schuldenmoratorium-f%C3%BCr-Afrika.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/coronavirus/letter-secretary-general-g-20-members>

*crisis, international and national humanitarian agencies and organisations engaged with Imams, pastors, nuns and priests to provide religious context to the changes that were being made to burial practices to stem the spread of Ebola. Religious leaders drew on passage from the Bible and Qur'an to show that these adapted, safe burial practices were not less personal and spiritual<sup>28</sup>*

- *Example: For instance, Dr. Kezevino Aram,<sup>29</sup> President, Shanti Ashram calls for increased collaboration between communities of faith, health professionals and governmental institutions to protect children during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, parents and caregivers should not hesitate to reach out to their local health facilities in case a child presents COVID-19-related symptoms; health care institutions should collaborate to increase and adapt preparedness and response mechanisms, including testing, teleconsulting, financial waivers.*
- *Religious leaders are encouraged to consider the care of their staff and support those providing religious support in medical settings, such as chaplains:*
  - *Example: "Chaplains are on the front lines in response to COVID-19 ..." said Wendy Cadge, founder of the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab." They are naming the uncertainty and anxiety we are all feeling, organizing, and seeking to continue being present and calm to those they serve."<sup>30</sup>*
  - *Example: CRS have developed a document<sup>31</sup> that collects best practices and offers advice and support to their local partners on how to respond to the emergency. These focus on different areas of response, including respecting staff's privacy and anonymity in case they become infected, ensuring they can receive their paychecks timely and in safe conditions, managing risk and enhancing/adapting communication, use of technologies, maintaining alignment with donor(s).*
    - *"If any staff are exposed to and/or test positive for COVID-19, their privacy and anonymity should be maintained. Work with them or through local health authorities to identify with whom they have been in contact (including other staff, project participants, other partner staff, etc) and ensure those persons are informed and recommended measures taken"<sup>32</sup>*

## **Section 1: Links to Resources**

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<sup>28</sup> PaRD, Religious Engagement in Humanitarian Crises: Good Practice Collection, Bonn, 24 May 2016 <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/service/news-archive/article/religious-engagement-in-humanitarian-crises-good-practice-collection/>

<sup>29</sup> Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram, "Time for a partnership: Caring for OUR Children during the COVID 19 Pandemic." Sent via private correspondence.

<sup>30</sup> Sent via private correspondence

<sup>31</sup> CRS, COVID 19: Considerations for Partners. <https://ics.crs.org/resource/covid-19-considerations-partners>

<sup>32</sup> CRS, COVID 19: Considerations for Partners. <https://ics.crs.org/resource/covid-19-considerations-partners>

## 2. Dispelling stigma, countering false information, and upholding rights

### Key issues

While a disease outbreak is developing, false information can be a major barrier to getting control of an outbreak<sup>33</sup>. In the most recent Ebola outbreak in 2018 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as well as the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, false information notably slowed response<sup>34</sup>. Further, stigma against certain groups may happen as those groups become associated with outbreaks, for example this was seen with malaria outbreaks.<sup>35</sup> Social stigma is a “negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease.”<sup>36</sup> Stigmatization can affect communities of faith but can also occur within them as a result of negative voices and messages spreading false information. Religious leaders and communities need to address them by developing contextualised strategies and mechanisms of communication on sensitive issues, for instance through interreligious networks that include minority religious groups.

When there is a large unknown like a new disease, fear can be the first reaction. However, it is essential to take steps to actively counter fear. In the case of COVID-19, stigma especially against Asian people and xenophobia have been reported<sup>37</sup>. Stigma can cause harm to individuals as well as cause other consequences: A person may hide when they are sick and not tell others or not get medical treatment or other not health seeking behaviours.<sup>38</sup> This will slow the outbreak response in a community.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 describes essential rights for all persons. article one that states “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Social Science in Humanitarian Action, Key consideration: online information, mis- and disinformation in the context of COVID-19 (March 2020). <https://www.socialscienceinaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SSHAP-Brief.Online-Information.COVID-19.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, Disinformation and Disease: Social Media and the Ebola Epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo <https://www.cfr.org/blog/disinformation-and-disease-social-media-and-ebola-epidemic-democratic-republic-congo>

<sup>35</sup> Smith, C., Whittaker, M. Malaria elimination without stigmatization: a note of caution about the use of terminology in elimination settings. *Malar J* 13, 377 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2875-13-377>

<sup>36</sup> IFRC, UNICEF & WHO, Social Stigma associated with COVID-19. [https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening\\_tools/COVID19%20Stigma%20guide%202002.pdf](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/COVID19%20Stigma%20guide%202002.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate/?fbclid=IwAR3JVkIK6InoJIVAS2brulW7EGgoVTSPsbwZxQ16TyRgD4F5VYXI8gTqD0>

<sup>38</sup> IFRC, UNICEF & WHO, Social Stigma associated with COVID-19. [https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening\\_tools/COVID19%20Stigma%20guide%202002.pdf](https://www.thecompassforsbc.org/sites/default/files/strengthening_tools/COVID19%20Stigma%20guide%202002.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Universal declaration of human rights, Article 1

Communities of faith affirmed upholding rights of all people aligning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through the development of the Faith for Rights framework.<sup>40</sup> The first commitment states, “Our most fundamental responsibility is to stand up and act for everyone’s right to free choices and particularly for everyone’s freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.”

People of faith and religious leaders should be encouraged to overcome fear and act on behalf of others. “As long as one person is humiliated, fearful, anxious, rejected, and discriminated against, our collective human quality is reduced.”<sup>41</sup>

As faith leaders are trusted figures in their communities, their position and authority provide a key way to inform communities of how to respond in a crisis. They can speak to the hearts of their members to affirm the rights of all people and support and encourage others.

## How religious leaders and communities can engage

### Counter False Information

- Provide timely communication with accurate information and a unified message. Help to stop spreading rumors by double-checking facts about COVID-19 before re-sending the information. In particular, help to ensure that public messaging is respectful and free of bias, avoiding the potential for stigma against any part of the population based on age or disability
  - *Example: The World Council of Churches in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic with faith-communities gave guidance for calls on communities of faith not to discriminate or exclude vulnerable groups: “Identifying the sources of threats is a natural reaction. But extending thoughts on dangers uniformly to one who is different, or from a vulnerable community and to exclude and discriminate against them is against our values and teachings. In most affected countries, the transmission of the coronavirus is already occurring locally - and not from imported cases. Experience in dealing with HIV and Ebola has shown that stigma and discrimination is against human dignity, against the will of God and fuels a pandemic”<sup>42</sup>*
  - *When the Ebola outbreak started in Sierra Leone, the religious leaders with the support of the resident minister secured radio spots so they could communicate through community*

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<sup>40</sup> #Faith4Rights toolkit <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/faith4rights-toolkit.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Religions for Peace, Combating HIV and AIDS Related Stigma, Denial and Discrimination: A training guide for religious leaders. <https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Combating-HIV-and-AIDS-Related-Stigma-Denial-and-Discrimination.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> World Council of Churches, Overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic with faith-communities: some guidance for churches, 21 March 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/resources/documents/overcoming-the-covid-19-pandemic-with-faith-communities-some-guidance-for-churches/>

radio about the outbreak, “the Kenema Christian Council and the Council of Imams spoke with one voice to address the outbreak.” Inter-religious council member, Sierra Leone<sup>43</sup>

- Catalyze local religious leaders and their communities to address various taboo issues including disease and illness through religious texts
  - *Example: Issues around illness and purity can be sensitive topics in many cultures and communities of faith. Authoritative voices are often needed to dispel problematic or false beliefs that contribute to the spread of illnesses. Building on their work against Ebola, World Vision<sup>44</sup> are training religious leaders to address such taboos, to spread accurate information and guidance about how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic among their communities of faith. With each successful training, graduates are added to WhatsApp groups where they receive up-to-date information. Trained religious leaders can then communicate further with their church/community members and Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs). World Vision have also developed a Channels of Hope methodology for muslim majority contexts in collaboration with Islamic Relief Worldwide.<sup>45</sup>*
- Empower and promote equal contribution to the response. Break prejudices, stigma, and discrimination against people with disabilities, including misconceptions that people with disabilities cannot contribute to the outbreak response or make their own decisions
- Address negative voices within communities of faith through contextualised dialogue strategies on sensitive issues, if possible in inclusive and interreligious settings
  - *Example: Gusii and Maasai women of faith in Kenya developed ways to foster reconciliation among their communities through prayers, forgiveness and mourning rituals drawing from their religious traditions <sup>46</sup> In Indore, India, Muslim youth have helped overcome logistic barriers in carrying out last rites after the death a Hindu woman<sup>47</sup>*
- Religious and community leaders monitor health guidelines to promote good hygiene practices, and ensure that, when worship gatherings resume, faith and pastoral workers follow hygiene in preparation of worship activities, know what to do if a member of the congregation has COVID-19, communicate risk responsibly, prevent the spread of misinformation and unpack harmful beliefs and practices
  - *Example: In many contexts around the world, harmful religious practices, or cultural practices justified on religious grounds, remain significant barriers to protecting communities of faith from a range of threats including pandemics like COVID-19. Religious leaders already play an important and active role in converging religious beliefs that emphasise equality and practices that discriminate, religious leaders therefore, could engage with religious teachings and beliefs to dismantle barriers to supporting everyone against COVID-19.<sup>48</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup> Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, Islamic Relief Worldwide, “Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response,” Featherstone, 2015. <https://jiflc.com/resources/keeping-the-faith-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-the-ebola-response-full-report/>. 28

<sup>44</sup> World Vision International, COVID-19: Guidance for Faith Communities.

[https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19%20Guidance%20for%20Faith%20Communities%20%28World%20Vision%20International%29\\_0.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/COVID-19%20Guidance%20for%20Faith%20Communities%20%28World%20Vision%20International%29_0.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.islamic-relief.org/protecting-children-across-the-world/>

<sup>46</sup> Ogega, Jackie, “How Women of Faith Deploy Religious Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding,” Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa (CIHA), January, 29 2016, <http://www.cihablog.com/how-women-of-faith-deploy-religious-resources-in-conflict-and-peacebuilding/>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://news.abplive.com/news/india/muslim-youth-in-indore-help-hindu-family-with-last-rites-1192777>

<sup>48</sup> Arigatou International, Faith and Children’s Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/what-we-do/faith-children-s-rights-a-study-on-the-crc>

## Dispel Stigma

- Speak out and take action against discrimination and stigma, especially of those who have been hospitalised and recovered
  - Examples: *“In the mosque, there are no special spaces for different people; there’s no prioritisation and so everyone is treated equally – even Ebola survivors. We give messages of hope about ‘life after Ebola’ and preach that people should sympathise with survivors as they are our brothers.” Muslim Faith Leader, Bo District Sierra Leone*<sup>49</sup>
  - *There may be suggestions that the reason that they were affected relates to them being ‘bad people’ or subject to the malice of the evil. The action of churches leaders and members to include and embrace those who have survived Ebola - witnesses powerfully against all such acts of blame and rejection.*<sup>50</sup>
  - *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church’s Developmental Bible says that, despite the stigma and fear associated with HIV/AIDS: “As much as we plead to God when we are in difficulty, we should also come to the assistance of people when they are in difficulty. We should always condemn the avoidance of people living with HIV/AIDS. We should, in fact, make it a matter of concern to help them in everything that we can afford. We should help them physically, financially, and psychologically. We can counsel and console them. We can show them our human as well as Christian compassion. There are many ways in which we can help the poor and the weak.”*<sup>51</sup>
  - *Example: One of the ways that stigma associated with COVID-19 can impact vulnerable people is through associating the fear of a new and unknown disease with the ‘other’.*<sup>52</sup> *To counteract the impact of the stigma and discrimination surrounding COVID-19, religious leaders can reflect on who is being stigmatized and why, considering how best to support them, in line with the section on supporting people facing vulnerabilities*
- Use platforms to amplify ways to support others during the pandemic.
  - *Example: Asian American Christian Collaborative issued a statement on Anti-Asian Racism in the Time of COVID-19. “To fellow Asian Americans: we see you, we hear you, and we long for a quick end to this particular period of coronavirus-related racism...We invite you to educate yourself, join the cause against anti-Asian racism, and be a part of the solution. It’s important for you to recognize the reality of this racism, to intervene (i.e., if you see something, say something), and to fight against xenophobic rhetoric and violence at every level.”*<sup>53</sup>
  - *Example: Many communities of faith are issuing statements to members. Archbishop Philip Anyolo states “As we recognize the imminent danger of this pandemic, we, however,*

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<sup>49</sup>Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, Islamic Relief Worldwide, “Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response,” Featherstone, 2015, <https://jiliflc.com/resources/keeping-the-faith-the-role-of-faith-leaders-in-the-ebola-response-full-report/>. 37

<sup>50</sup> Faith in a time of Ebola. <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church, “Developmental Bible” <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/search?q=Developmental%20Bible>, 42-43

<sup>52</sup> UNICEF, WHO, IFRC, Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/social-stigma-associated-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<sup>53</sup>Asian American Christian Collaborative, Statement on Anti-Asian Racism in the Time of COVID-19. <https://asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/covid19statement>

*request that we avoid any tendencies or attitudes of discrimination and stigmatization of the affected persons”<sup>54</sup>*

- Hold an awareness raising campaign:
  - *Example: Use media avenues that work for the context, for example, Sarvodaya created a series of videos on COVID-19 awareness.<sup>55</sup>*

## **Section 2: Links to Resources**

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<sup>54</sup> Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) - COVID-19 *Guidelines from Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa on Safe Mass Gatherings*, 20 March 2020  
<http://amecea.blogspot.com/2020/03/kenya-covid-19-guidelines-from.html>

<sup>55</sup> Sarvodaya, Community Awareness Videos. <https://www.sarvodaya.org/2020/03/20/sarvodaya-community-awareness-videos-covid19>

# 3. Religious gatherings and adaptations of rituals

## Key issues

The current global outbreak of COVID-19 has already and will inevitably change the ways in which religion is practiced by communities of faith around the world. Initial news reports<sup>56</sup> highlighted how religious gatherings could result in clusters of coronavirus outbreaks leading to restrictions or bans on religious gatherings.<sup>57</sup> More recent news reports<sup>58</sup> have told of tensions due to believers defying restrictions from the authorities on religious gatherings, as well as apologies issued by religious leaders who had not adequately reacted to the crisis causing further infection.<sup>59</sup> Religious practices have had to adapt and develop in health emergencies before - this is not new<sup>60</sup> - and we can draw on experience of previous responses to epidemics and other health emergencies, such as recent Ebola outbreaks.

Medical experts at the World Health Organization insist that physical distancing<sup>1</sup> or avoiding physical contact is essential to stopping the spread of COVID-19. In a situation where physical distancing and specific hygiene protocols are necessary measures to ensure public health in many contexts, in-person activities such as religious gatherings and rituals need to be cancelled, restricted or significantly modified. At the same time, communities of faith need to develop alternative ways to be able to practice their religion and feel connected to their spiritual guides and to other members of the community.

Supported by faith and the best information on public health, religious leaders across the world are temporarily closing their temples, mosques, synagogues, churches, and gurudwaras to avoid the risk of infecting one another and to save lives. This is especially painful in this time of crisis when many believers would turn to their places of worship for hope and spiritual support. It is also a time of year when many faith communities would usually be celebrating central religious occasions, such as Easter, Passover, and Ramadan.

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<sup>56</sup> E.g. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/malaysia-mosque-event-virus-hotspot-se-asia-200318021302367.html>

<sup>57</sup> E.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/religious-festivals-cancelled-or-scaled-back-due-to-coronavirus>

<sup>58</sup> E.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/iranian-police-shrines-coronavirus>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3074640/coronavirus-hong-kong-buddhist-temple-linked>

<sup>60</sup> *Thinking carefully about religious practice concerning an infectious disease transmitted by touch is not something new. At the time that the Bible was written, leprosy was understood to be a disease transmitted by touch, whose spread through a population could be prevented if appropriate measures were taken. Leviticus 13: 1-8* (Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, p. 12)

Religious leaders are particularly well positioned to guide their communities in adapting to hygienic requirements and to distancing measures during the COVID-19 outbreak.

- They can provide theological grounding for the adaptation of rituals and the cancellation/restriction of religious gatherings.
- Knowing who are the most vulnerable community members (e.g persons with disabilities), they can specifically target them to make sure they are not exposed to the virus and that they receive practical as well as spiritual support
- They can use their influence, trust and visibility in the community to disseminate scientific information on how to avoid the spread of the virus, and to counter misconceptions and resistance to follow the guidelines (see also the section in dispelling stigma and countering false information).
- They can creatively engage in setting up alternative ways to provide spiritual support, worship and other religious activities remotely, where possible through the use of different technologies (TV, Radio, Phone Calls, SMS, Online Meeting Apps, Social Media, etc.).

While academic research in this area is predictably lagging behind, there are clear signs that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, actors from different religious traditions as well as non-religious actors, have already mobilised quite quickly with guidance on the role of religious leaders in responding to COVID-19 with regards to religious rituals and gatherings. In particular, these guidance documents have focused on:

- Avoiding/restricting/modifying other in-person practices and rituals (including funerals)
- Ensuring hygiene and physical distancing requirements (including no exchange of handshakes) are respected in religious buildings
- Protecting vulnerable community members from exposure to infection
- Providing alternative remote/virtual spiritual support and worship (where possible)
- Facilitating online and other remote activities within the community (where possible)

Based on these guidance documents, this section provides an overview of how religious leaders can contribute to counter the spread of COVID-19 in their communities while ensuring the continuation of worship and practice.

## How religious leaders and communities can engage

### Guidance on religious gatherings

For more detail please refer to WHO Guidance for Religious Leaders<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> WHO, Guidance for Religious Leaders and Faith-based Communities: Practical Considerations and Recommendations in the Context of COVID-19. <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

- Religious gatherings should be cancelled, or postponed. Small gatherings (of 10 people or fewer) can be allowed according to national/local guidance,<sup>62</sup> but all gatherings are discouraged
- The number of people indoors should be strictly limited and physical distance should be maintained according to official guidance (WHO 1 meter/3 feet).
- Before and after every gathering, members should use supervised hand washing/ hand sanitisers facilities at the entrance of every religious building<sup>63</sup>
- Although the COVID-19 virus has not been detected in drinking-water supplies, and the risk to water supplies is low, having access to safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions is vital for protecting people's health during COVID-19, primarily through hand washing.<sup>64</sup> Religious Leaders play an important role in providing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and advocating for healthy behaviours including hand washing, including to those who face vulnerabilities.<sup>65</sup>
  - Religious texts: *Cleanliness is next to godliness* (Psalm 51:78); *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with clean water* (Hebrews 10:22); *And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts...* (Psalm 24:3b-4a); *Islam commands the regular washing of hands. In Sahih Muslim, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "If any one of you awakes from sleep, let him wash his hands three times before inserting them into the container, for he does not know where his hands slept* (Sahih Muslim: 278)
  - Example: *Religious leaders can continue to inform and educate communities of faith about healthy behaviours. World Vision works with trusted community leaders, many of whom are religious leaders '...to discuss and learn from one another about issues of child well-being and community health.'* As a result, religious leaders support World Vision's work in this area and are mobilised as key community advocates in the implementation of their WASH programmes.
  - Example: *It is estimated that 780 million people around the world do not have access to an improved water source.*<sup>66</sup> *In recent years, many countries have experienced water shortages and droughts. Dirty water and poor sanitation lead to over 300,000 children under five dying of diarrhoea every year.*<sup>67</sup> *Informal and unreliable water supplies leave many people, particularly those facing vulnerabilities like prisoners, people living in camps or slums and the homeless unable to follow hand washing and physical distancing*

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Church of England, Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for churches.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches?fbclid=IwAR0jKHqWF27t270YwZR-qlSNWBpXeGVTPJbaGwZQNK9fJJQN2eu-uuL5Mw#na>

<sup>63</sup> Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, p. 10. See also: Rose Aslan (Religion News Service), "What Islamic hygienic practices can teach when coronavirus is spreading." <https://religionnews.com/2020/03/16/what-islamic-hygienic-practices-can-teach-when-coronavirus-is-spreading/>.

<sup>64</sup> World Vision, WASH Programmatic Recommendations for COVID-19. <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR, Technical WASH Guidance for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response, 04 April 2020, [file:///C:/Users/ellen/Downloads/UNHCR%20Technical%20WASH%20Guidance%20for%20COVID-19%20Preparedness%20and%20Response%20\(UNHCR,%202020\)%20Ver2.1%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/ellen/Downloads/UNHCR%20Technical%20WASH%20Guidance%20for%20COVID-19%20Preparedness%20and%20Response%20(UNHCR,%202020)%20Ver2.1%20(2).pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch/Erika Nguyen And Namratha Somayajula, Access to Water Vital in COVID-19 Response. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/22/access-water-vital-covid-19-response-0>

<sup>67</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_92918.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_92918.html)

*guidelines against COVID-19. Religious leaders have a role to play in lobbying for access to clean water and sanitation facilities. The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA) calls on religious leaders to 'play an active role in appealing to local governments to fulfil their responsibilities in providing access to sanitation, safe drinking water, and garbage disposal'.<sup>68</sup>*

- *Another of the GIWA objectives is to enable faith-based organizations to deliver Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Programmes and WASH training, and provide sanitation facilities, improved access to water and sanitation, as well as more pristine aquifers. In settings which are water scarce, communities of faith can emphasise handwashing, and that the quality of the water does not need to be drinking water quality. Other key messages for these contexts include turning off water while lathering soap to reduce waste, let water flow to waste (do not use a communal shared water bowl to wash as that could spread the virus among those washing hands in that bowl) and efforts should be made to use the source of water that is the highest possible quality<sup>69</sup>*
- Religious buildings should be cleaned in compliance with specific hygienic requirements<sup>70</sup>
- No direct touch of each other nor of religious objects should be allowed e.g. sharing books, cup, bowls, plates or food associated with religious practices, laying on of hands<sup>71</sup>. COVID-19 can be spread through touching objects and surfaces on which droplets from the nose or mouth of someone with COVID-19 have landed, or through breathing in droplets after a person with COVID-19 coughs out or exhales. Even small gatherings can therefore contribute to the spread of COVID-19, as it is important to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.<sup>72</sup>
- Vulnerable members (elderly, adults and children with disabilities and those who have existing health conditions) should be asked to stay at home<sup>73</sup>
- Anyone who is sick should stay at home
  - *Examples: Within the Guidelines from Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa on Safe Mass and Gatherings,<sup>74</sup> the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) urges priests to observe high levels of hygiene for liturgical ceremonies, allowing the eucharist to be received on the hand until the virus abates. In the same document, the Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC) advises that "since public gatherings are banned, we urge our clergy, religious, catechists and laity to refrain from conducting the Stations of the Cross, crusades, worships and retreats of more than 10 people."<sup>75</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup>The Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA) Promoting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All, [https://innersense.nl/PDF/Wash\\_For\\_Life\\_Alliance.pdf](https://innersense.nl/PDF/Wash_For_Life_Alliance.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> WHO/UNICEF, Water quantity, how to ensure sufficient water for handwashing, WHO and UNICEF source

<sup>70</sup> E.g. CDC - Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fdisinfecting-building-facility.html)

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> WHO, Q&A on coronavirus (COVID-19). <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

<sup>73</sup> E.g. British Board of Imams and Scholars, COVID-19 Guidance. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus/>

<sup>74</sup> Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) - COVID-19 Guidelines from Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa on Safe Mass Gatherings. <http://amecea.blogspot.com/2020/03/kenya-covid-19-guidelines-from.html>

<sup>75</sup> Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) - COVID-19 Guidelines from Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa on Safe Mass Gatherings <http://amecea.blogspot.com/2020/03/kenya-covid-19-guidelines-from.html>

- The WHO has a decision tree for religious leaders and faith communities to use to understand if it is safe to open for religious gatherings.<sup>76</sup>
- *Presbyterian Disaster Preparedness guide: “Develop a means for worship when the congregation cannot gather. Some options:*
  - “Contact local radio stations to explore remote feeds or taped worship.
  - Contact the local TV network about broadcasting videotape of worship services, church messages, or other events.
  - Ask your computer internet service provider about podcasts and live internet feeds of worship, Sunday school classes, or other events. While the initial investment may be costly, this could open up a whole new ministry for those unable to attend - at a very reasonable continuing cost. Web based conferencing video/audio services such as skype.com or gotomeeting.com might be helpful. Develop a continuation of business plan.
  - Talk to vendors and utility companies about reduced operations at the church due to closures.
  - Plan for continuing office operations and whether increased security will be warranted during closures. Can some employees work from home?
  - Food pantry ministry – discuss a plan to continue operations within the guidelines for public gatherings and with precautions not to spread the [virus]. Is home delivery viable?
  - Member care group - explore how to provide palliative care and nutrition support to those unable to care for themselves (because of prior conditions or the virus.)
  - Meals on wheels or other home feeding programs may be expanded to accommodate additional needs.”
- *The Rabbinical Council of Victoria (Australia) has issued a Rabbinical Guidance on COVID-19<sup>77</sup> stating that Pikuach Nefesh (saving life) - you must self-isolate to save others lives, you must not be in contact with others if you are sick - overrides other religious practices. In particular, the Guidance warns that people over 65 years of age and sick people/people with medical conditions should refrain from attending public spaces, including the synagogue. People still attending the synagogue should keep 1.5 meters distance from each other and avoid touching the Torahs or mezuzahs.*
- *The British Board of Scholars and Imams<sup>78</sup> provides detailed guidance on religious gatherings, including on who is advised not to attend (e.g. members of communities where there is evidence of a wide spread of the infection, people over 60 and those in regular contact with them). In particular, it states that Jumua (Friday prayer) can take place at home in small groups of three people without the presence of an Imam. It also advises to refrain from Jumua completely in case hygiene and social-distancing requirements cannot be observed.*
- *Sikhs from the have produced guidelines for Gurdwaras and the Sikh community to have contingency plans regarding Covid19 at hand. These include live streaming of worship, mobile food banks, helping older and vulnerable people, pregnant women, as well as information for business and sole traders all in alignment with government advice. Since*

<sup>76</sup> [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-tree-religious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-tree-religious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a_2)

<sup>77</sup> Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV), Australia, Rabbinical Guidance on COVID-19 <https://vic.thecsg.org.au/covid-19-community-information/rabbinical-guidance-on-covid-19/>

<sup>78</sup> British Board of Imams and Scholars - COVID-19 Guidance. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus/>

*the Gurdwara is not only the place of worship but also the abode of the living Guru, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, who needs to be enthroned every day, this building needs to remain open. A few sewdaars (volunteers) who should not have any underlying health issues will strictly adhere to physical distancing while practicing religious rituals. Langar and Prashad should be prepared and blessed daily where possible even on a very small scale as part of the religious duties.<sup>79</sup>*

## Guidance on adaptation of rituals

- Change rituals as much as medically necessary but as little as possible otherwise, especially keeping the wording of funerals and other rituals the same<sup>80</sup>
- Carefully explain any change to members, including why it is strictly necessary.<sup>81</sup> If relevant, provide theological and historical evidence supporting changes in rituals<sup>82</sup>
- Discourage attendance or pay special attention to protecting children and older people in attendance
- Good communication by religious leaders is key to helping believers adapt to temporary limitations and unite in prayer and action<sup>83</sup>
  - *Example: There is theological and historical evidence that supports the evolution of religious practices in keeping with changing circumstances. For example, '[t]he destruction of the temple created unimaginable crises in the religious sensibilities of ancient Jews, but also became a platform to reimagine how religious ritual worked. The ability for modern religious communities to adapt and innovate rituals in light of circumstances, then, has deep and very .'<sup>84</sup>*

## Funerals and Burial

Changes in funerals and burials can be particularly unsettling and difficult to implement. A useful brief<sup>85</sup> suggests that a contextual understanding of vulnerabilities related to epidemics and death-related rituals can be achieved through a discussion between researchers and scientists working on preparedness and response and members of the community. This discussion should include, for instance, questions on existing experiences of adaptation of mourning/burial and funeral practices due to war, epidemics or other disasters. It should also address the issue of who in the

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<sup>79</sup> City Sikhs of the UK, Coronavirus Update for the Sikh Community.

<http://www.citysikhs.org.uk/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-update-for-the-sikh-community->

<sup>80</sup> E.g. Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola

<https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, 11

<sup>81</sup> E.g. Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola, 11

<sup>82</sup> E.g. [Muyonga](#), I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola, 11

<sup>83</sup> E.g. Miseen Cara, Missionary Responses to Ebola Virus Crises, January 2018,

<https://jilifc.com/resources/missionary-responses-to-ebola-virus-crises-miseen-cara/>, 4

<sup>84</sup> The Conversation/ Samuel L. Boyd, Religious Communities are offering baptism by zoom - such innovation has deep historical roots, 24 March 2020 <https://theconversation.com/religious-communities-are-offering-baptism-by-zoom-such-innovation-has-deep-historical-roots-134183>

<sup>85</sup> Ripoll, S., Gercama, I., Jones, T., "Assessing Key Considerations for Burial Practices, Death and Mourning in Epidemics", Practical Approaches Brief, *Social Science in Humanitarian Action*, Issue 2, April 2020.

<https://www.socialscienceinaction.org/resources/assessing-key-considerations-burial-practices-death-mourning-epidemics/>

community should be part of the decision-making process, and what it should look like. Religious leaders are key players to involve in such discussion processes.

## **Christian**

The Massachusetts Council of Churches' Guidelines for Christian funerals during COVID-19<sup>86</sup> affirm the need not to put more lives in danger while celebrating life. They stress the importance of acknowledging the pain and disappointment that families and friends of the deceased can experience when facing a change in the ritual. One option is to share with them the church's guidelines and to decide jointly who can take part in the service (if possible, and to a maximum of 10 people). When attending a funeral in person, the guidelines suggest avoiding physical contact by always holding a book or a prayer in your hands, as well as frequently washing them. Distance should be kept especially between attendees who don't live in the same household.

- *If washing the body or shrouding are part of faith traditions, modifications will be needed to protect mourners, including gloves and other protective coverings*
- *Strictly limit the number of family members in attendance at a funeral, maintaining physical distancing. Memorial services can be celebrated, where possible, at a later date*
- *Wakes and viewings are discouraged because of the challenges in maintaining physical distancing. In any event, mourners avoid touching the body or the casket and keep distance. Clean hands before and after the viewing*
- *If the technology is available and if considered appropriate, services are streamed online for a wider audience.*
- *Arrange for the bereaved family to be actively supported by individual members of the community following physical distancing rules*
- *The difficulties and importance of caring for people as they navigate sickness, death and bereavement resulting from COVID-19 is recognised in the Massachusetts Council of Churches' message to clergy : 'Hear our affirmation: it is always sacred work to bury the dead. This is additionally complicated. Thank you for using the best of your pastoral skill, wisdom and experience to show the enduring love of Christ to grieving people. Through you, those who mourn know that they are not alone.'*

## **Muslim**

The Fiqh Council Council of North America's guidance "Prayer and Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19"<sup>87</sup> includes specific indications on the modification of death-related rituals. For instance,

- *in case the body cannot be washed in the traditional manner, it is allowed to pour water over the body without scrubbing and without even changing the clothes of the deceased.*
- *In case even this cannot be done and there is a genuine danger or reasonable doubt regarding harming the health of those around the corpse, tayammum can be done, in which case the one in charge of the corpse may, even while wearing gloves, wipe the face and hands of the deceased after touching some sandy surface. Tayammum takes the place of ghusl in dire circumstances, and this applies to both the living and the dead.*

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<sup>86</sup> Massachusetts Council of Churches, Guidelines for Christian funerals. <https://www.masscouncilofchurches.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020.03.24-Christian-Funerals-during-COVID19-Version-3.0.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Fiqh Council of North America - Prayer and Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19 (see also Council's other documents on COVID-19) <http://fiqh-council.org/prayer-and-funeral-issues-pertaining-to-covid-19/>

- *In case even tayammum is not able to performed and the corpse is required to be wrapped up in a special sealed body bag, the obligation of both ghusl and tayammum is lifted, and it would not be considered sinful if the body is laid to rest as is.*
- *Cremation is not allowed in Islam, and this should be avoided in all circumstances. In case it is made mandatory by law, the community, after consulting with health experts and legal experts, should try their best to get an exemption for the Muslim community*

## Hindu

The Hindu Forum of Britain has issued a Coronavirus Health Awareness Announcement<sup>88</sup> on how to keep believers safe when they attend the Mandirs (e.g. alternative ways of greeting to maintain distancing, use of face masks and disposable gloves, regular cleaning of hands and surfaces, avoid distribution of prayer books). The announcement also includes Funeral and Cremation advice to inform believers on safe practices that do contradict Vedic rituals (no embalming).

- *For instance, they recommend performing last rituals at the crematorium instead of taking the body of the deceased home, washing all clothes separately and disinfecting them, carefully taking care of personal hygiene after rituals, avoiding dressing the body, and using online technologies for prayers and mantras.*

## Sikh

It is allowed to conduct funerals at Gurdwaras under strict conditions. Pregnant women, elderly over the age of 70 and vulnerable people should not attend the funeral. As a minimum, Kirtan Sohila and Ardas should be recited before committal. If a Granthi is unavailable to do this, any family member can carry this out.<sup>89</sup>

## Judaism

The Whitefield Hebrew Congregation has issued guidance on how to afford the greatest respect to the departed, while also upholding the Jewish principle of Pikach Nefesh, the preservation of life, by adapting Jewish burial and mourning practices according to government guidance on COVID-19.

- To be able to observe physical distancing, all funerals will be held outdoors and people will be asked to stand some distance apart from one another.
- Attendance at levoyas will be limited to immediate family members only and individuals are encouraged to consider live streaming.
- While it is a halachic imperative to correctly mark a grave, and stone setting ceremonies should take place if possible, due to physical distancing guidance, they have been postponed.
- Another example of adaptations made by the Whitefield Hebrew Congregation in regards to Jewish burial and mourning practices is that “sitting shiva”, the period of seven days observed by mourners can exist whether or not formal services are held or the kaddish is recited. The azkaran, the memorial prayer, can still be recited without a minyan. While shiva visits and rabbinical hospitality cannot take place, community members can comfort

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<sup>88</sup>Hindu Forum of Britain - Corona Virus Health Awareness Announcement  
<http://www.hfb.org.uk/item/53-corona-virus-health-awareness-announcement.html>

<sup>89</sup> City Sikhs of the UK, Coronavirus Update for the Sikh Community.  
<http://www.citysikhs.org.uk/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-update-for-the-sikh-community->

mourners and fulfil the mitzvah of nichum aveilim in other ways, through telephone calls and emails.<sup>90</sup>

## Guidance on alternatives to in-person worship and other practices

Religious leaders and communities of faith around the world are finding innovative ways to be present for each other. To reduce overcrowding, religious leaders are finding creative ways, through digital mediums, to connect with their community:

- Move teaching and worship activities online where possible. This can be livestream, conferencing, or pre-recorded and then shared. There are several tools to facilitate this and it can be an opportunity for religious leaders to learn how to connect and maintain community links remotely.<sup>91</sup> Young people in the community with good digital literacy may be able to take on key roles to help with online religious gatherings.
- Not everyone has access to resources for full virtual services. Other options are text messaging, phone trees, and WhatsApp groups. Other methods include delivery of postcards, letters, and sanitised objects, respecting physical distancing measures
  - *Examples: The United Church of Christ provides ideas for digital pastoral care,<sup>92</sup> both individual and collective, including the use of platforms like Zoom and Facebook, but also through text messaging and sending cards.*
  - *The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab<sup>93</sup> offers strategies and tools for tele-chaplaincy during the COVID-19 crisis.*
  - *The Baha'i community in Italy<sup>94</sup> has used creativity and technology to keep community members in contact despite physical distancing measures. For instance, joint prayers and spiritual discussions have been held in online conferences.*
  - *The Fiqh Council Council of North America has stated that “there is no sin in broadcasting the janāzah procedure (the procession and burial) live to family members, as long as Islamic decorum and dignity is observed.”<sup>95</sup>*
  - *The Won Buddhist Won Buddhist temple in Gangnam, Seoul, South Korea, organizes public online streaming of prayer services.<sup>96</sup> This allows believers with access to the internet to regularly take part in religious practices while respecting social isolation. · The website Tricycle<sup>97</sup> offers a collection of online reflections and teachings to support practice during the pandemic, Dharma Talks to help against mental and spiritual distress, and .*

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<sup>90</sup> Whitefield Hebrew Congregation, Guidance on Jewish life during coronavirus, 30 March 2020, <https://www.thewhc.co.uk/jewish-life-during-coronavirus/>

<sup>91</sup> See links to tools at end of document

<sup>92</sup> United Church of Christ - Digital Pastoral Care for Grief: Individual & Collective <http://ihpemory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Digital-Pastoral-Care-for-Grief-Individual-Collective.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, Chaplaincy Innovation Lab shares resources for chaplains encountering coronavirus. <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/2020/03/chaplaincy-coronavirus>

<sup>94</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-jLLWhUQYo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-jLLWhUQYo&feature=emb_logo)

<sup>95</sup> Fiqh Council of North America - Prayer and Funeral Issues Pertaining to COVID-19 (see also Council's other documents on COVID-19) <http://fiqh-council.org/prayer-and-funeral-issues-pertaining-to-covid-19/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEnyMwkEQWr47BtNVmTRq8w/>

<sup>97</sup> Tricycle, Practicing in a Pandemic; Together Alone: Online Sanghas in the Age of Social Distancing; Dharma Talks for the Coronavirus Outbreak. <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/coronavirus-meditations/>; <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/online-sanghas/>; <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/coronavirus-dharma-talks/>

- *Social communication in times of sickness and danger has always been of utmost importance for the Jewish tradition; where visitation in these challenging times is no longer feasible, technological tools become even more important. The technological tools for communication that we now have at our disposal are invaluable in overcoming the isolation that present circumstances demand. “Rabbinic directives for social distancing and curtailing prayer gatherings and other religious social meetings are not new. What is new however, are the technological possibilities that modern society provides as possible responses to these challenges. As a result, rabbinic authorities have been spurred to rule on the use of remote technologies such as Zoom for prayer services and even the approaching Pesach seder meals.”<sup>98</sup>*
- *Modern technology has provided the possibility for multiple Sikh communities to live stream their ceremonies<sup>99</sup>*

### [Section 3: Links to Resources](#)

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<sup>98</sup> Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Jewish Teaching in the Face of Pandemics, available at Religions for Peace Multi-religious Response to COVID-19, Jewish Resources, <https://rfp.org/urgent-multi-religious-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19/resources/>; Long version article available at: <https://religionnews.com/2020/04/02/this-wont-be-the-first-social-distancing-passover/>

<sup>99</sup> Examples include:

- Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (Park Avenue): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnLz0COPV5c>
- Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCowAO1flh6qO9suMEtPRATg>

## 4. Spiritual well-being, resilience, empathy, and community service

### Key issues

Mental health, spiritual and social support is key during a pandemic. Religious leaders can play an important role in reaching out to believers addressing the specific spiritual needs that arise as a result of the outbreak - e.g. fear, loss, additional stress. Throughout history, religious leaders have cared for people's mental health. As a result, it is estimated that worldwide, forty percent of people who experience mental health concerns turn to religious leaders as first line assistance.<sup>100</sup> Religious leaders have a potentially distinctive role to play in responding to emergencies like COVID-19, through their provision of mental health, social and spiritual support. Communities of faith often suggest that their social and spiritual needs are just as important as their physical survival in times of crisis. The continuation of religious practices, beliefs and community can be important ways of coping and building individual and community resilience to trauma.<sup>101</sup> Religious leaders can play an important role in reaching out to believers addressing the specific spiritual needs that arise as a result of the outbreak - e.g. fear, loss, additional stress.

In times of social isolation due to COVID-19, communities of faith face the challenge of having to find ways to continue and enhance support networks, while complying with anti-COVID-19 public health requirements. Furthermore, they need to address the issue of specific groups which might be facing additional vulnerabilities, such as children, women, people with health conditions, elderly (see brief 4. People facing vulnerabilities, including violence against children, refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities).

The documents issued so far by actors from different religious traditions as well as multi- and non-religious actors focus on the following key issues:

- Making sure people's spiritual and mental needs during the COVID-19 outbreak are addressed
- Spreading positivity and hope and countering fear
- Providing time and virtual spaces for reflection, calm and prayer
- Mobilizing resources for community support networks
- Providing assistance to those who are particularly vulnerable in regards to their mental health

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<sup>100</sup> Schafer, A (2010) Spirituality and Mental Health in Humanitarian Contexts an exploration based on World Vision's Haiti Earthquake Response, *Intervention*, 8(2), pp.121-130.

[https://www.interventionjournal.com/sites/default/files/Spirituality\\_and\\_mental\\_health\\_in\\_humanitarian.4.pdf](https://www.interventionjournal.com/sites/default/files/Spirituality_and_mental_health_in_humanitarian.4.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Peres, J.F.P, Moreira-Almeida, A, Nasello, A.G and Koenig, H.H (2007) Spirituality and Resilience in Trauma Victims, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 46(3), pp.343-350. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-08473-001>

## How religious leaders and communities can engage

### Mental and Spiritual Health

Religious leaders and communities of faith can consider the following actions:

- Carefully address spiritual and mental needs of members (fear, loss, additional stress)<sup>102</sup>
- Outreach efforts include positive messages of hope and reassurance, building on religious teachings around the experiences of overcoming suffering and tests<sup>103</sup>

#### *Religious teachings to support spiritual and mental health during the pandemic*

- Examples: The resource for Congolese churches, “Faith in time of Ebola”, suggests a Christian discussion of fear as connected to what we do not know and cannot control is combined with scientific information about Ebola and a biblical study of religious texts to give hope that fear can be overcome, such as 1 Samuel 17 (David and Goliath). God teaches us: “Do not be afraid”.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the resource highlights the importance of addressing the needs of those affected by quarantine measures, who need to be aware that religious leaders and other members are supporting them through the period of physical isolation.<sup>105</sup>
- Religious texts: And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient (Quran, 2:155, Sahih International)
- The British Board of Scholars and Imams<sup>106</sup> invites religious leaders to spread messages of hope and positivity, such as Religious teaching: Behold! Allah’s help is indeed near (Quran 2:214), and to support members in maintaining Islamic behaviours towards oneself and the community. This can mean, for instance, making sure false messages do not circulate in the community, that prices for certain goods are not increased (for businesses), and that mental health is protected by avoiding to spend too much time on social media.
- Different Buddhist groups are taking action to help people deal with the stress and anxiety induced by COVID-19. For example, the American Buddhist teacher Lama Tsultrim Allione<sup>107</sup> is leading a five-step process of ‘Feeding Your Demons’ on Youtube and on Facebook Live and Tricycle, The Buddhist Review, have put together a series of

<sup>102</sup>E.g. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - COVID-19: Stress and Coping <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

<sup>103</sup> E.g. Anglican Alliance - Faith in a time of COVID <https://anglicanalliance.org/faith-in-a-time-of-covid-19-coronavirus/>

<sup>104</sup> Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, 2-4.

<sup>105</sup> Muyonga, I. and Beasley, M. with support of Norwegian Church Aid - Faith in time of Ebola <https://www.ccih.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Faith-in-Time-of-Ebola-EN.pdf>, 10.

<sup>106</sup> British Board of Scholars and Imams, COVID-19 Guidance. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus>

<sup>107</sup> Lama Tsultrim Allione, Feeding Your Demons. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEbj\\_maF\\_fo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEbj_maF_fo)

Dharma Talks for coping with these issues, based on reflections and teachers by Buddhist writers and teachers.<sup>108</sup>

- Prayer can be an important coping strategy in times of crisis. In the Sikh Dharam, prayer is paramount for mental and physical well being, helping people remain optimistic in uncertain times. Keertan (singing the praises of God) can help uplift the soul and it is considered important to listen to or recite them whenever and wherever possible. When facing difficulties, Sikhs are advised to remain calm, trust and have faith and confidence in God. It is important for Sikhs to pray for all those who are suffering but also to accept God's will. Sikhs in their daily prayers ask for blessings for the whole of humanity-Sarbat dha Bhalla.
- There are interfaith efforts to bring hope and reassurance to communities of faith. Religions for Peace's Official Interfaith Commitment highlights the importance of communities of faith coming together during uncertain times: "United by hope with the entire human family and guided by the values of my own tradition, I commit to both prayer and action in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. I commit to be a source of peace and comfort for all people in these troubling times. [...] I commit to protecting and upholding the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable among us, including those experiencing discrimination. In solidarity with the entire human family, I commit to using this moment to deepen my understanding of our innate interconnectedness and renew my faithful commitment to a world where no one is left behind."

- Engage in and organise spaces of prayer, meditation, and reading of sacred texts as a space for quieting the mind and finding calm. These can also be conducted online or through shared resources.<sup>109</sup> It is important to keep in mind accessibility of information and platform, so persons with disabilities can engage on the equa basis.
- Religious leaders and other members engage with groups facing specific increased vulnerabilities who are particularly isolated and may experience extreme loneliness and stress (the elderly, those with compromised immune systems, persons with disabilities , single parents, those who have lost jobs, homeless persons, children)<sup>110</sup>
  - *Support for children can be tailored to fit their specific needs. UNICEF's guidelines "How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)"<sup>111</sup> offer more comprehensive guidelines on how to engage in respectful and meaningful conversations on COVID-19 with children, that can be used by parents, educators, religious leaders and other care providers. For example, they suggest to convey information in a reassuring way,*

<sup>108</sup> Tricycle, Practicing in a Pandemic; Together Alone: Online Sanghas in the Age of Social Distancing; Dharma Talks for the Coronavirus Outbreak. <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/coronavirus-meditations/>; <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/online-sanghas/>; <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/coronavirus-dharma-talks/>

<sup>109</sup> E.g. Institute for Jewish Spirituality - Resources for Challenging Times. <https://www.jewishspirituality.org/get-started/resources-for-challenging-times/>; Macy, J. - Spiritual Practices for Times of Crisis [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/spirituality-crisis\\_b\\_871311?fbclid=IwAR0rUOgH\\_0roGUN0GckTMQ4\\_1PGOJdW5YOgHXMhM9rOcelZ8B\\_MT0oqvaw&gucounter=1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/spirituality-crisis_b_871311?fbclid=IwAR0rUOgH_0roGUN0GckTMQ4_1PGOJdW5YOgHXMhM9rOcelZ8B_MT0oqvaw&gucounter=1)

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, CRS, COVID-19 Safe and Dignified Programming: Protection Mainstreaming and Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Guidance. <https://ics.crs.org/resource/crs-covid-19-safe-and-dignified-programming-protection-mainstreaming-and-mental-health>

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF, How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

*listen to what children say about their thoughts and feelings, be honest and stick to the truth, make sure they feel free to say if they are experiencing stigmatization, and take how to take care of parents' and childrens' mental health.*

- Emergency situations can put a significant amount of pressure on religious leaders. This means that they and other community leaders providing support to the community are advised to take care of their own spiritual and mental health and give time for this.<sup>112</sup> Support yourself to support others.

## Supporting Neighbors and Serving the Community

- They can support the establishment of (safely-equipped) volunteer groups that can provide essential services to those in need. For example, people with disabilities who live at home often rely on community-based social services to meet their basic daily needs, including for meals and hygiene. During the emergency those services could be interrupted and volunteer groups with adequate protection equipment may become life-saving entities.
- All faiths encourage supporting other humans, and looking beyond ourselves. During COVID-19, faith communities need to re-imagine what support and care for each other looks like<sup>113</sup>.
- Religious leaders and communities of faith draw on religious teachings for guidance in uncertain times. Across religious traditions, religious teachings highlight the importance of helping others and maintaining a sense of community:

### *Religious teachings on supporting others and serving the community*

- Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13); Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew, 10:8); The believers are but a single brotherhood.... (Qur'an 49:10); It is obvious that you cannot call yourself a believer if you do not help others, especially those who are poor and unable to go to the hospital for healthcare; You cannot value and save lives without assisting those who are unable to go to the hospital. God said,...help you one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancor.... (Qur'an 5:2) Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him) said, God helps those who help others; The Prophet called upon everybody to help others, as he said, "Believers are like one body, when one organ is aching, pain spreads through the whole body
- "Do not stand on a high pedestal and take 5 cents in your hand and say, "here, my poor man", but be grateful that the poor man is there, so by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of

<sup>112</sup> E.g. Doehring, C. Coping with moral struggles arising from coronavirus stress: Spiritual self-care for chaplains and religious leaders. <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Doehring-2020-Coping-with-moral-struggles-arising-from-coronavirus-stress.pdf>

<sup>113</sup> E.g. Kezevino Aram, President, Shanti Ashram. Disrupting the pandemic: Science, Society and Solidarity! <https://rfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Disrupting-the-Epidemic-Science-Spirit-and-Society-together-Kezevino-Aram-March-2020.pdf>

benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.” Swami Vivekananda, famous Hindu Monk who spoke at the World Parliament in 1893

- "All Jews are responsible each for the other." Talmud, Shavuot
- "Doing good to others is not a duty. It is a joy, for it increases your own health and happiness." Zoroaster
- The importance of social communication in times of sickness and danger have always been a matter of serious concern for Jewish tradition; and where visitation is not feasible, these technological tools become even more important." "A hundred and fifty years ago, Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan known popularly as the Chafetz Chaim highlighted the religious obligation to communicate with family during war time as a matter of "pikuah nefesh" saving life, even if this was only through the psychological effect of such (Mahaneh Yisrael, 35 1,48)."<sup>114</sup>
- When the mind is impartial towards all living beings, one can accomplish full and perfect Great Compassion. By using the Mind of Great Compassion to accord with living beings, one perfects the making of offerings to the Thus Come Ones." (Buddhism: The Avatamsaka Sutra, Ch. 40)
- "Just as you do not like misery, in the same way others also do not like it. Knowing this, you should do unto them what you want them to do unto you." 7654 | The Bhagavati Aradhana, Jainism (780)
- Akal Takht, the highest seat of Sikh Authority issued an Edict Regarding Coronavirus To The Worldwide Sikh Community<sup>115</sup> on March 23, 2020. It instructs Sikhs to assist those in their respective regions to provide food according to Guru Nanak 's free kitchen and help in distribution of medicines and other necessary items to those in need. Sikhs should follow the instructions of governments and health departments in their countries regarding self isolation.<sup>116</sup>

- Religious leaders can encourage generosity as a way to live out faith in times of crisis. By promoting generosity as a spiritual discipline among communities of faith, religious leaders can remind communities of faith to connect with the needs of others and what they can do to help<sup>117</sup>
- Active training and care for faith community volunteers so that they may protect themselves adequately while serving others <sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Chief Rabbi David Rosen KSG CBE (2020): Jewish Teaching in the Face of Pandemics, available at Religions for Peace Multi-religious Response to COVID-19, Jewish Resources, <https://rfp.org/urgent-multi-religious-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19/resources/>; Long version article available at: <https://religionnews.com/2020/04/02/this-wont-be-the-first-social-distancing-passover/>

<sup>115</sup> Edict Regarding Coronavirus To The Worldwide Sikh Community. <https://www.sikh24.com/2020/03/23/breaking-akal-takht-issues-edict-regarding-coronavirus-to-the-worldwide-sikh-community/#>

<sup>116</sup> Edict Regarding Coronavirus To The Worldwide Sikh Community. <https://www.sikh24.com/2020/03/23/breaking-akal-takht-issues-edict-regarding-coronavirus-to-the-worldwide-sikh-community/#>

<sup>117</sup> Horizons/ Joe Park, Why Choose Generosity in Times of Uncertainty and Fear? 18 March 2020, Official Interfaith Commitment by Religions for Peace

<sup>118</sup> CRS, COVID-19 Safe and Dignified Programming: Protection Mainstreaming and Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Guidance. <https://ics.crs.org/resource/crs-covid-19-safe-and-dignified-programming-protection-mainstreaming-and-mental-health>

- Ensuring that religious leaders and faith community volunteers have what they need to protect themselves and other volunteers, and emphasising the importance of maintaining physical distance and regular hand washing, through regular debriefing meetings
- Trained religious leaders and members of communities of faith can be part of the frontline response delivering psychosocial care and first aid and making referrals when needed. Religious leaders and communities of faith can continue to provide Mental Health, Social and Spiritual Support remotely.

*The IASC suggests a number of measures to support those affected by COVID-19, including people facing vulnerabilities. Religious leaders and communities of faiths, through their established networks, are well positioned to adopt these measures. For example, religious leaders and communities of faith can set up telephone hotlines staffed by trained personnel with accurate information about COVID-19. Other online platforms such as WeChat and Whatsapp can be used to set up virtual social support groups.*<sup>119</sup>

- Active outreach to neighbors especially those who may need special assistance is needed (do not assume that they already have support in place and see also the section below on people facing vulnerabilities). While maintaining physical distance, they should be assisted if they need help with food or health care. In this sense, establishing/strengthening a network of volunteers can be key<sup>120</sup>
  - *The UK Board of Imams and Scholars in a briefing encouraged their members to “increase in charitable works; paying due attention to the rights of your family and neighbours;”*<sup>121</sup>
- Those assisting community members refrain to do so if they have even mild symptoms or need to self-isolate<sup>122</sup>
- Religious leaders coordinate other community and faith-based organisation, as well as with local health officials on 1) possible ways to use your facilities for temporary care, quarantine or central distribution sites for food, water, supplies, or medicine and 2) ways to ensure care and services for groups facing specific vulnerabilities<sup>123</sup>
  - *Examples: The Sikh Research Institute in the United States’ document “COVID-19: A Sikh perspective and response”*<sup>124</sup> states that Gurduaras and Sikh organizations should not limit themselves to the cancellation of public gatherings. It encourages them to offer online services and think creatively about how to assist vulnerable members. In particular, it suggests engaging healthcare workers and logistics professionals to help provide food and

<sup>119</sup> IASC, Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak 1.5. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-reference-group-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-emergency-settings/interim-briefing>

<sup>120</sup> E.g. The Muslim Council of Britain, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Mosques/Madrasas and Umrah Pilgrims.

<https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/coronavirus-guidance-for-mosques-and-madrasas/>

<sup>121</sup> British Board of Imams and Scholars, UK Community Briefing for Imams, Mosques, Madrasas for the coronavirus pandemic. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus/>

<sup>122</sup> E.g. [British Board of Imams and Scholars - COVID-19 Guidance](#)

<sup>123</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

<sup>124</sup> Sikh Research Institute in the United States, COVID-19: A Sikh Perspective & Response. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPpSziJIB8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPpSziJIB8&feature=emb_logo)

medicines to those who are in need. It also invites members to pray<sup>125</sup> for the whole humanity, volunteer if they can, or donate money to workers performing essential tasks. Several Sikh organizations and Gurdwaras in the UK are providing mobile food delivery and other support to vulnerable people. Businesses have also been contributing by donating money to the efforts of various communities to provide food.

The Sikh Food Bank- Sikhs in Scotland<sup>126</sup>

- In their “COVID-19 Safe and Dignified Programming: Protection Mainstreaming and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) guidance”,<sup>127</sup> Catholic Relief Services recommend training all staff working with COVID-19 affected people in Psychological First Aid (PFA), and to make sure that staff receive adequate support, including counselling if needed. When reaching out to community members, CRS warns that high levels of tension and possibly violence might be encountered, often within families and sometimes towards healthcare workers. They suggest training community leaders on what can cause stress and how to address the situation so that existing networks of trust, solidarity and support are protected and enhanced.
  - The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)’s Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Mosques/Madrasas and Umrah Pilgrims<sup>128</sup> provides tools and advice on how to engage as volunteers in local communities, including through regular phone calls or contact on social media, delivery of food/meals, donations to local food banks. The Guidance gives advice on how to identify individuals and groups who might be facing specific vulnerabilities, including elderly, people with no access to a car for transport or to sufficient economic resources. It includes infographics from MCB and other sources, as well as links to relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as the National Health Service in the UK (including for volunteer registration), WHO and the Mental Health Foundation. The Guidance also contains information about how to financially support businesses and individuals, including through Jumuah collections and grants through the National Zakat Foundation.<sup>129</sup>
- Communities of faith often organize in or are part of groups that coordinate and implement financial and other types of solidarity initiatives. These might need guidance to modify/temporarily cancel regular meetings and other activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>125</sup> Religious teachings: *Pray as victorious people, not as defeated beings!*. See also video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPpSziJIB8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAPpSziJIB8&feature=emb_logo)

<sup>126</sup> Further information on Sikh guidelines: <https://www.sikhsinscotland.com/sikh-food-bank/>  
Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, Gravesend: <https://www.gurunanakdarbar.org/langar-delivery>  
Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Birmingham:

<https://www.facebook.com/nishkammedia/photos/a.734769176728075/1257431904461797>

Nishkam SWAT, West London/NW London/Swindon/Croydon:

<https://twitter.com/NishkamSWAT/status/1241839589792382976/photo/1>

Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall: <https://www.sgsss.org/event/coronavirus-support/>

<sup>127</sup> CRS, COVID-19 Safe and Dignified Programming: Protection Mainstreaming and Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Guidance. <https://ics.crs.org/resource/crs-covid-19-safe-and-dignified-programming-protection-mainstreaming-and-mental-health>

<sup>128</sup> The Muslim Council of Britain, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Mosques/Madrasas and Umrah Pilgrims. <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-updates/coronavirus-guidance-for-mosques-and-madrassas/>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.nzf.org.uk/blog/zakat-and-coronavirus/>

- *An example are CRS's Savings and Internal Lending (SILC) groups,<sup>130</sup> that regularly meet to develop microfinance possibilities for poor households. CRS's guidance document<sup>131</sup> suggests options for SILC groups to consider, according to government policies and regulations related to the public health emergency. It also provides guidance on how to modify procedures and implement sanitizing measures, including for instance fines for not washing hands/not covering one's mouth when coughing.*

#### **Section 4: Links to Resources**

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<sup>130</sup> CRS' Savings and Internal Lending (SILC) methodology is a holistic, savings-led microfinance approach that provides a safe place for poor households to save and borrow to increase their income. The goal is to help members better manage their existing resources by teaching them basic financial management skills. <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/program-areas/savings-led-microfinance>

<sup>131</sup> CRS, Guidelines for SILC Groups during COVID-19 Pandemic <https://ics.crs.org/resource/guidelines-silc-groups-during-covid-19>

## 5. People facing vulnerabilities, including violence and with a focus on children and families

### Key issues

People facing vulnerabilities can be disproportionately affected by pandemics like COVID-19. Vulnerable groups suffer the highest degree of socio-economic marginalisation and become even more vulnerable in emergencies<sup>132</sup>. Vulnerable groups can face a wide range of additional challenges during pandemics like COVID-19, including but not limited to:

- A lack of access to health services and accurate information
- Exclusion from decision-making processes and strategies to combat the virus
- Discrimination due to fear and uncertainty leading to hostility and hatred towards others
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Impact from other shocks at the same time as the pandemic, such as flooding and droughts
- Fewer opportunities to change and adapt
- Higher risk of violence, including violence against children, from being quarantined in unsafe situations
- High risk of dying from the virus

Women, the elderly, youth and children, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, refugees, migrants, and minorities experience the highest degree of marginalization, need priority assistance, and need involvement in decision making processes. Previous epidemics illustrate the value of engaging with women when communicating about risks, as women form the majority of staff in health workforces, are primary caregivers to children, the elderly, and the ill, and may have limited access to information, especially if community engagement is led by men.<sup>133</sup>

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies defines vulnerability as the

*'...diminished capacity of an individual or group to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a... hazard. The concept is relative and dynamic. Vulnerability is most often associated with poverty, but it can also arise when people are isolated, insecure and defenceless in the face of risk, shock or stress.'*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> IFRC, OCHA, WHO, COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement,

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ctuhu7Qn9B\\_YcnaTdHKCIAXFQHuzpMu4tAUtPMcffyQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ctuhu7Qn9B_YcnaTdHKCIAXFQHuzpMu4tAUtPMcffyQ/edit)

<sup>133</sup> IFRC, OCHA, WHO, COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement, 15 Mar 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-how-include-marginalized-and-vulnerable-people-risk-communication-and>

<sup>134</sup> IFRC, What is vulnerability.

<https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/what-is-a-disaster/what-is-vulnerability/>

Vulnerability is therefore a highly relevant topic in light of the health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The wide ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic requires multi-sector responses by a range of actors. All vulnerable groups will require additional support against COVID-19. Many faith actors have a long history of helping and supporting vulnerable groups, such as through Zakat (Islam) and dana (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism). Today, faith actors are drawing on these religious teachings and traditions to help support and provide for people facing heightened vulnerabilities during COVID-19.<sup>135</sup>

This section will highlight some of the areas in which communities of faith support vulnerable people, and then focus on children and families.

## How religious leaders and communities can engage

### People facing vulnerabilities

- Local religious leaders', including youth and women leaders', embeddedness in their communities means they are well positioned to identify and reach-out to vulnerable people and groups to offer support. Through religious networks, they are able to effectively mobilise human and financial capital to help those in need and use their trusted, authoritative voices to advocate for vulnerable people. Religious leaders can also use religious teachings and practices to convey to vulnerable groups vital information about how to prevent and fight the disease.<sup>136</sup>
  - *Example: The British Board of Imams and Scholars, in their COVID-19 Briefing paper, suggests that if everyone ensures they know who is vulnerable and what support they will need, '...the community and volunteer network will be well aware of those who need assistance. Do not assume that they already have support in place....-Mosques should use their communication channels (social media, WhatsApp etc.) to recruit healthy volunteers to shop for the vulnerable and socially isolated. It is especially important that the vulnerable do not leave their homes.'*
  - *Community mapping is one way to understand and identify people who face particular vulnerabilities. Such community mapping strategies could include those '...may have special needs in the event of a medical emergency, and define how the [community of faith] can be involved in their support' as outlined by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance's Preparedness for Pandemics resource.<sup>137</sup>*
  - *Through processes of community mapping and being embedded in local communities, religious leaders and communities of faith can identify the specific needs of individuals. Religious leaders and communities of faith can therefore help develop accessible*

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<sup>135</sup> UNHCR, Partnership Note on Faith-based Organizations, Local Faith Communities and Faith Leaders. <https://www.unhcr.org/539ef28b9.pdf>

<sup>136</sup> E.g.s CIFA- IMA, "Stopping a Killer: Preventing Malaria in Our Communities: A Guide to Help Faith Leaders Educate Congregations and Communities About Malaria", Christian version. [https://imaworldhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CIFAbrochure\\_Christian\\_FNL\\_pagesHR.pdf](https://imaworldhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CIFAbrochure_Christian_FNL_pagesHR.pdf)  
CIFA- IMA, "Stopping a Killer: Preventing Malaria in Our Communities: A Guide to Help Faith Leaders Educate Congregations and Communities About Malaria", Muslim version. <https://jilifc.com/resources/stopping-killer-malaria-prevention-muslim-guide/>

<sup>137</sup> Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Preparedness for Pandemics. <https://pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/disease-guidance-for-congregations/>

communication messages that take into account people with disabilities, especially communications related disabilities<sup>138</sup>

- Refugees, migrants and those displaced and/or living in camps can be excluded from preparations and strategies for responding to COVID-19 and they require specific considerations for planning and readiness against the virus.<sup>139</sup> Religious leaders, communities of faith and their networks can include these populations and their distinct challenges in their community mapping and preparation processes.
  - “When a COVID-19 case is confirmed at a collective site, contacts need to be identified and monitored for 14 days, even when quarantine or isolation is not possible... - A mapping should be undertaken to identify the areas most at risk: areas where people are living in particularly overcrowded conditions, with higher densities, with less space for expansion, more in contact with population at risk or with higher proportion of vulnerable population. Wherever possible, mitigation measures to reduce overcrowding should be put in place: Collective sites in which households are sharing the same shelter should be upgraded as much as possible to achieve minimum shelter standards of personal covered living space and household partitions rather than collective.”
- Local religious leaders and communities of faith are well positioned to know what staff, volunteers, members, people they serve, and neighbors might need extra assistance due to social isolation and economic hardships if staying at home for an extended period
  - Example: Older people who need to self-isolate may feel highly stressed and anxious, especially during periods of isolation.<sup>140</sup> Religious leaders often have established relationships of trust within local communities. Religious leaders therefore have an important role to play in providing emotional support, in-person or remotely. Religious leaders can also help communicate, repeating when necessary, important information and messaging, to help ensure that older people trust and follow the guidance. Religious leaders established relationships with vulnerable people in light of COVID-19 means they can address questions, fears and misinformation in a calm and non-anxious environment<sup>141</sup>
- Religious leaders and communities of faith are situated to know who have disabilities, especially those who live alone. They can identify employees and volunteer staff who may be unavailable because they need to stay home to care for a family member with disability.
- Religious leaders and communities of faith are often first responders during crises, providing for people’s immediate physical and material needs.<sup>142</sup> This role is set to become

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<sup>138</sup> IASC, Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak Version 1.0, [https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL\\_26-February-2020-UN.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL_26-February-2020-UN.pdf), p.12.

<sup>139</sup> IASC, Interim Guidance Scaling-Up Covid-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response Operations in Humanitarian Situations, Including Camps and Camp-Like Settings, 17 March 2020. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/interim-guidance-scaling-covid-19-outbreak-readiness-and-response-operations-camps-and-camp>

<sup>140</sup> IASC, Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak Version 1.0, [https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL\\_26-February-2020-UN.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL_26-February-2020-UN.pdf), p.11.

<sup>141</sup> IASC, Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak Version 1.0, [https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL\\_26-February-2020-UN.pdf](https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Newsroom/MHPSS-COVID19-Briefing-Note-FINAL_26-February-2020-UN.pdf), p.12.

<sup>142</sup> Ager, A and Ager J (2011) Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism, Journal of Refugee Studies, 24(3), pp.456-472. <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/24/3/456/1567970?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

increasingly significant in low-resource settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, where medical services and structures are weak and medical equipment is sparse.<sup>143</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic is also likely to have serious economic and social consequences for these contexts, which will see people require more material assistance<sup>144</sup>

- Communities of faith can include the provision for support of vulnerable groups in their preparation plans for COVID-19
  - *Example: The British Board of Imams and Scholars Briefing Paper on COVID-19 suggest that 'Muslim charities have a great responsibility to provide support to the affected where they can. They may provide financial assistance to those who may be out of work, are not receiving sick pay, provide food parcels to families affected etc'.*<sup>145</sup>
  - *Example: Some services delivered by communities of faith and Faith-Based Organisations will need to be adapted in light of scientific, medical advice. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Community of Sant'Egidio in London provided feasts for elderly, homeless and the lonely to eat together in London. They are now delivering takeaway services so those vulnerable people can still receive food.*<sup>146</sup>
- Advocacy for and provision of materials in accessible formats to ensure all members of community, including persons with disabilities, have access to life-saving information:
  - *Example: "Key behaviour focused messaging on prevention of COVID-19 and available assistance may not reach people with visual, hearing or intellectual impairments if it is not provided in multiple and accessible formats. Concretely, this means all messages must be available in Braille and large print for people who are blind or have low vision. When those are not available or not used by local populations, information should be provided orally (e.g. through loudspeakers in the community). Religious leaders can advocate to ensure that all community stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, religious leaders and local health workers are sensitized about risks faced by children and adults with disabilities and have the capacity to communicate the life-saving messages to them."*<sup>147</sup>
- The gendered dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic raises a number of concerns for women and girls. Religious leaders and communities of faith play a significant role in reducing the burden of women's responsibilities during COVID-19.
  - *Example: During crises, women and girls often shoulder the majority of emotional and physical caregiving responsibilities.*<sup>148</sup> *Religious and traditional leaders can engage with efforts to protect women, girls and other vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on religious and traditional beliefs and texts that resonate with communities of*

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<sup>143</sup> Global Health Now/Margaret Muldrow, Health Care Facilities Are Everyone's Frontline.

<https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2020-04/health-care-facilities-are-everyones-frontline>

Center for Global Development, Strengthening the Basics: Approaches to COVID-19 Care in low-resource settings,

<https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2020-04/health-care-facilities-are-everyones-frontline>

<sup>144</sup> World Bank, World Bank Group Launches First Operations for COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Emergency Health Support, Strengthening Developing Country Responses.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/02/world-bank-group-launches-first-operations-for-covid-19-coronavirus-emergency-health-support-strengthening-developing-country-responses>

<sup>145</sup> British Board of Imams and Scholars, COVID-19 Guidance. <http://www.bbsi.org.uk/coronavirus/>

<sup>146</sup> Community of Sant'Egidio, "In London, Solidarity is still possible".

<https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/30284/langID/en/itemID/35200/In-London-solidarity-is-still-possible.html>

<sup>147</sup> UNICEF, COVID-19 Guidance: Engaging Children and Adults with Disabilities in Risk Communications.

[https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19\\_engagement\\_children\\_and\\_adults\\_with\\_disabilities\\_final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/COVID-19_engagement_children_and_adults_with_disabilities_final.pdf).

<sup>148</sup> The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers/Taylor Ramsey, Gender Equity and Inclusion in the Time of COVID-19: Why Religious and Traditional Leaders Matter. [https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/gender-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-time-of-covid-19-why-religious-and-traditional-leaders-matter/#\\_ftn1](https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/gender-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-time-of-covid-19-why-religious-and-traditional-leaders-matter/#_ftn1)

*faith, religious leaders in trusted positions within their communities can confront the distinctive issues faced by women and girls. Religious leaders can emphasise that caretaking is everyone's responsibility<sup>149</sup> and encourage cooking, eating and doing domestic duties together to help share caregiving responsibilities and strengthen family bonds.<sup>150</sup>*

- *Example: During health crises, obstetric health services are de-prioritised to deal with the virus, leaving pregnant and breastfeeding women vulnerable. Religious leaders can support pregnant and breastfeeding women by sourcing accurate information and communicating key messages<sup>151</sup> about topics such as breastfeeding infant feeding during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>152</sup>*
- Charity and assistance from communities of faith can be directed at the most vulnerable in communities, including food provision, transportation services, medical supplies, financial assistance
  - *Example: The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's Development Bible emphasizes the importance of charity as a way of showing compassion in response to HIV & AIDS: "God loves mercy more than anything else as he has this to say, "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burned offerings." (Hos 6:6). Charity to the needy is one way of showing compassion. If a person assists the destitute and the weak, he is very compassionate. Among the destitute, physically weak and the impoverished are victims of HIV and AIDS. [...] Let us help victims of HIV and AIDS physically, financially and morally.'*
- Communities of faith can help vulnerable people feel empowered; help them see what choices they have, where they have control over their situation and how they can help others. Vulnerable individuals are not passive victims of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are people with agency
  - *Example: According to the Anglican Alliance's response to COVID-19 there are '...three key points which people need in times of crisis: connection to community, information – accurate and contextual and agency – the ability for individuals to make meaningful choices, even if within limited options.'<sup>153</sup>*
- Communities of faith, religious leaders in particular, often advocate for vulnerable groups, drawing on their established positions within communities to speak from their elevated platforms in society, to give a voice to those whose voices are excluded from decision-making processes
  - *Example: In the document Churches' Commitments to Children: Churches uniting for children in the pilgrimage of justice and peace from the World Council of Churches and*

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<sup>149</sup> UNICEF, Easy, affordable and healthy eating tips during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/easy-affordable-and-healthy-eating-tips-during-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak>

<sup>150</sup> UNICEF, Easy, affordable and healthy eating tips during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/easy-affordable-and-healthy-eating-tips-during-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak>

<sup>151</sup> The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers/Taylor Ramsey Gender Equity and Inclusion in the Time of COVID-19 *Why Religious and Traditional Leaders Matter*, [https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/gender-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-time-of-covid-19-why-religious-and-traditional-leaders-matter/#\\_ftn1](https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/gender-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-time-of-covid-19-why-religious-and-traditional-leaders-matter/#_ftn1)

<sup>152</sup> UNICEF, Navigating Pregnancy During Coronavirus Disease. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/navigating-pregnancy-during-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>153</sup> Anglican Alliance, Faith in a time of COVID. <https://anglicanalliance.org/faith-in-a-time-of-covid-19-coronavirus/>

*UNICEF, churches commit to using their voice to call on governments to protect children and adolescents in emergencies*

- *Example: Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund and Islamic Relief Worldwide's report Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response shows how during the Ebola crisis, 'in addition to the provision of material assistance, faith leaders also played an important advocacy role as the theory about the services provided to those under quarantine was often far better than reality. In such situations, faith leaders lobbied community leaders, service providers and the government on the importance of ensuring that adequate support was provided' (p.39)*
- *Example: Faith-Based Organisations can draw on the skills of communities of faith to support and advocate for vulnerable people like Refugees and Migrants. HIAS legal programs for asylum seekers work with attorneys remotely, representing detained clients in legal processes. HIAS works with partners for case management and providing healthcare services and educational opportunities for Asylum Seekers.*

## Focus on Children and Families

### Violence

During isolation, children and caregivers may find themselves confined in a space with an abuser. The incidence of violence, given the stress of the pandemic and quarantining, may increase. Religious leaders can play a key role in raising awareness of these stresses, fostering parents' and caregivers' self-care and care towards children<sup>154</sup>, and helping people understand how to address and curb violence in their homes, including reporting violence and referral mechanisms for assistance.

- *Example: Many religious leaders and communities of faith are already involved in responding to family violence. The New York Board of Rabbis works with religious leaders through their Family Violence Prevention Program<sup>155</sup> to help them be able to identify and respond to instances of family violence and help prevent child sexual abuse and trafficking. In Southern Cambodia, the International Catholic Child Bureau works to highlight the challenges associated with sex tourism.<sup>156</sup>*

### Gender-based violence

Women and girls may be vulnerable to higher risks of violence and sexual exploitation if they are isolated at home, in unsafe situations<sup>157</sup>. E.g. women and girls with disabilities who experience disruption of essential services, restricted movements and have primary responsibility for caring for their families are at increased risk. Other marginalised groups may be at higher risk of gender based violence and further isolation, like LGBTQ people. As part of Norwegian Church Aid's

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<sup>154</sup> Arigatou International, Faith in Action for Children: 12 Messages and Actions to Ensure Children's Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/response-to-covid19#posters>

<sup>155</sup> New York Board of Rabbis, Family Violence Response. <https://nybr.org/family-violence-response.html>

<sup>156</sup> Arigatou International, Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/what-we-do/faith-children-s-rights-a-study-on-the-crc>

<sup>157</sup> E.g. Arigatou International, Faith in Action for Children: 12 Messages and Actions to Ensure Children's Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/response-to-covid19#posters>

preparation advice for COVID-19, they suggest a number of measures to prevent Gender Based Violence (GBV).<sup>158</sup> These measures included:

- engaging in local coordination mechanisms,
- preparing community outreach workers,
- Making sure information and reporting channels are available in multiple and accessible formats to accommodate needs of all groups
- Ensuring GBV services continue to be provided and available, re-assess referral pathways and how to do group meetings
  - *Example: Religious communities can be aware of an increase in domestic violence and support efforts to prevent and counter it. The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)'s document "Islamic perspective on engaging men and boys to end violence in the family"<sup>159</sup> highlights how, since they occupy most of the power and authority roles in Muslim communities, male RLs need to teach their communities the values of gender equality, condemn any kind of violence in the family and support women's empowerment, both based on sacred scriptures and by acting as behaviour models. This resource provides scripture-based guidance on gender equality, positive Islamic masculinity, ways to counter wrong interpretations of religious texts on gender and domestic violence. It also suggests an "Islamic Model for Managing Marital Disputes".<sup>160</sup> Further guidance on contemporary Islamic approaches to gender equality and justice can be found in Musawah's document "Islam and the question of Gender Equality"<sup>161</sup>*
- There are a number of religious teachings from across multiple religions that can be drawn on to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender justice

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<sup>158</sup> Norwegian Church Aid, Guidance Note: NCA Programme Preparedness and Response to COVID-19, 13 March 2020, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/3blffdhg0t46pek/NCA%20-%20COVID-19%20humanitarian%20guidance.pdf?dl=0>

<sup>159</sup> Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), Islamic perspective on engaging men and boys to end violence in the family. <http://ccmw.com/engaging-men-and-boys-to-end-violence-in-the-family/>

<sup>160</sup> Specific guidance on managing marital disputes - p. 15 of CCMW's document: "The Qur'an advises that when couples find themselves in a dispute, they try to resolve the problem between themselves. First, they are encouraged to engage in mutual consultation, and communicate their perspectives to each other. Second, they are advised to separate from the marital bed so that they can think about the issue at hand in isolation from their sexual relationship. Third, they are encouraged to separate from each other, perhaps in separate houses altogether, as the Prophet himself did when he was in a dispute with his wives. The couple is encouraged to thereby take some time alone and think about what is at stake as they resolve their dispute. If all of these measures fail to bring out reconciliation, then the couple is advised to engage in arbitration, and then divorce proceedings, but the Qur'an makes clear here that both parties ought to have representation, emphasizing the right of women to have legal representation alongside men."

<sup>161</sup> Musawah, Islam and the question of Gender Equality. <https://www.musawah.org/resources/knowledge-building-brief-3-islam-and-the-question-of-gender-equality-en/>

*Religious teachings to counter violence against women, men, boys, and girls:*

- "Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged in the least" (Q. 4:124; see also 3:195, 16:97, and 57:12). "Whenever one spouse is in conflict with the other, for example, the Qur'an prescribes engaging in a three part method for resolution: "Engage in mutual consultation, separate from the marital bed, and (finally) walk away from them." (Q. 4:34)"<sup>162</sup>
- "Be a sign of love, a manifestation of mercy, a fountain of tenderness, kind-hearted, good to all and gentle to the servants of God, and especially to those who bear no relation to thee, both men and women." (Baha'i: Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v3, p. 619)
- "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Corinthians 15:10) "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God." (1 Corinthians 11-12)
- In the Sikh Dharam men and women are equal. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion, over five hundred years ago exalted the status of women and gave them a place of honor. God's Divine Light is in both men and women so women are not inferior "In a woman man is conceived,  
From a woman he is born, With a woman he is betrothed and married, With a woman he contracts friendship.  
If one dies another one is sought for, Man's destiny is linked to woman.  
Why call her inferior who gives birth to humankind?  
From a woman a woman is born, None may exist without a woman.  
Only the One True Lord is not born from a woman..." (Sri Guru Granth Sahib p.473)

## Violence Against Children

- Many communities of faith are already committed to eradicating violence against children,<sup>163</sup> the sexual exploitation of children, and the use of corporal punishment.
  - *Example: Leaving no child behind, the protection of children & preventing all forms of violence against children is central to Islam & Christianity as evidence by the work done by*

<sup>162</sup> In Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), Islamic perspective on engaging men and boys to end violence in the family. <http://ccmw.com/engaging-men-and-boys-to-end-violence-in-the-family/>

<sup>163</sup> UN, Violence against children: A hidden crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/violence-against-children-hidden-crisis-covid-19-pandemic>

*Al Azhar University and UNICEF (2005), and Al Azhar University, UNICEF and the Coptic Orthodox Church (2016)* <sup>164</sup>

- *Example: In the document Churches' Commitments to Children: Churches uniting for children in the pilgrimage of justice and peace from the World Council of Churches and UNICEF, churches commit to promote child protection through church commitments, including contributing to the end of violence against children and adolescents which in all forms is '...antithetical to God's will' and more broadly supporting child protection in emergencies.*<sup>165</sup>
- *Example: UNICEF and RfP joint publication "From Commitment to Action What Religious Communities can do to eliminate violence against children" (2010): "Religious communities are uniquely positioned to prevent and respond to violence against children. There is strong consensus across religious traditions about the dignity of every child and the need to protect children from different forms of violence. The inherent rights of the child are present in the teachings and traditions of the world's major religions."* <sup>166</sup>
- Communities of faith can raise awareness about the dangers of online abuse, particularly as children spend more time online during isolation.<sup>167</sup>
  - *Example: Different communities of faith can be mobilised against online sexual exploitation. For example, Sikh concepts such as the innate light in all human beings, the belief that 'the child is blessed with a meditative state and protected by an intimate connection to God' (p.27) and the Sikh inspiration to overcome our negativity and to mobilise the best within ourselves (p.28) informs their efforts to protect children from online abuse. 'Contemporary action by Sikhs includes the 2015 launch of the Safer Sikh Partnership 73 to promote 'effective safeguarding practices' to protect children from sexual abuse, grooming and violence, to facilitate collaboration with police services and act on issues considered taboo or highly stigmatised. Sikhs have also provided inter-religious input to develop an educational framework of 24 spiritual and moral dispositions for schools in Birmingham, UK, as part of a longer term strategy to embed value-led thinking across all aspects of societal life.'* (p.28)<sup>168</sup>
- Children in extreme poverty suffer a number of hardships including a lack of access to health, social, educational and support services that can heighten their risk of illness and result in limited job opportunities, stigmatization and social exclusion. The impact of such multi-layered deprivation can constitute a severe form of violence against children.

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<sup>164</sup> Al-Azhar University and UNICEF. (2005). Children in Islam: Their care, development and protection. Abu Kraishah, T. et al. ed., First ed. New York: UNICEF, 1; Al-Azhar University, UNICEF & Coptic Orthodox Church., 2016. Peace. Love. Tolerance. Key Messages From Islam & Christianity On Protecting Children From Violence And Harmful Practices.

<sup>165</sup> World Council of Churches/UNICEF, Churches' Commitments to Children: Churches uniting for children in the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

[https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/wcc\\_commtmntchildren\\_UNICEF\\_ENG\\_PRODweb.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/wcc_commtmntchildren_UNICEF_ENG_PRODweb.pdf)

<sup>166</sup> UNICEF and Religions for Peace, From Commitment to Action What Religious Communities can do to eliminate violence against children.

[https://www.unicef.org/protection/What\\_Religious\\_Communities\\_can\\_do\\_to\\_Eliminate\\_Violence\\_against\\_Children\\_\(UNICEF\\_Religions\\_for\\_Peace\\_Guide\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/What_Religious_Communities_can_do_to_Eliminate_Violence_against_Children_(UNICEF_Religions_for_Peace_Guide).pdf)

<sup>167</sup> E.g. Arigatou International, Faith in Action for Children: 12 Messages and Actions to Ensure Children's Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/response-to-covid19#posters>

<sup>168</sup> ECPAT and Religions for Peace, Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation: A Guide To Action for Religious Leaders and Communities, [https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/FBO\\_Guide\\_for\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_and\\_Communities\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/FBO_Guide_for_Religious_Leaders_and_Communities_ENG.pdf)

- *Example: Many faith-based responses to child poverty take a multi sector approach, that recognises the interlocking nature of poverty and violence. The Shanti Ashram<sup>169</sup>, a Gandhian organization, based in southern India works with Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Christian and Sikh groups within local communities to end the cycle of extreme violence against children. Their Bala Shanti program works to end poverty, promote healthy child development and discourage child marriage. Similarly, Red een Kind,<sup>170</sup> a Christian international organisation based in the Netherlands, works to find long-term solutions so that young homeless people can gain the knowledge, talent and skills to achieve their goals.*
- *Children with disabilities and their families are disproportionately impacted due to lack of life-saving materials in accessible formats, risk of interruption of essential health services, Girls and boys with disabilities may be at risk of exclusion from education if remote/distance learning programmes are not accessible or they do not have assistive devices to allow participation and accommodate learning needs.*
- *Religious leaders and communities of faith play a key role in responding to the physical and material needs of vulnerable children. COVID-19 will see many families who are already dependent on casual, low-paid or unstable work to lose their jobs or lose out of wages due to isolation. For many families, there is nothing to fall back on in these circumstances. Without savings or social protection services, many families will experience economic hardship as a result of COVID-19. This will see many children miss out on meals for example, particularly with traditional care providers such as schools and nurseries being closed.<sup>171</sup>*
- *Religious leaders and communities of faith have an important role to play in advocating for vulnerable children and families to ensure that their physical and material needs are taken care of. For example, the chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development has issued a statement urging policymakers to provide aid and relief to those suffering from COVID-19.<sup>172</sup>*

## Child and Youth Protection and Participation

- Religious leaders and faith communities can collaborate with public health and child protection regulations and services, with non-state actors and with other faith communities who can help protect children and adolescents and maintain social cohesion to enable the protection of children and adolescents.
  - *Example: Child-rights advocates are not always aware of the contributions made by communities of faith towards realising children's rights and well-being. There is therefore 'a vast and relatively untapped common ground - and potential for fruitful concrete cooperation - that is not adequately recognized by religious groups or by advocates of children's rights.' Cooperation between non religious and faith-based actors for child-rights and well-being could be a powerful tool for protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>173</sup>*

<sup>169</sup> <http://www.icphhealth.org/our-vision/shanti-ashram/>

<sup>170</sup> <https://www.redeenkind.nl/>

<sup>171</sup> Save the Children, Coronavirus is a devastating blow to children in poverty.

<https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/coronavirus-devastating-blow-children-poverty>

<sup>172</sup> US conference of Catholic Bishops, Statements on Coronavirus. <http://www.usccb.org/news/2020/20-45.cfm>

<sup>173</sup> Arigatou International, Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/what-we-do/faith-children-s-rights-a-study-on-the-crc>

- *To ensure child protection, religious leaders can work with the appropriate bodies, and within communities of faith, to promote standard processes for alternative care, should their caregivers become sick or pass away due to COVID-19*
- *World Vision's draft COVID child protection guidance calls for communities to*
  - *Ensure effective reporting and referral mechanisms are in place*
  - *Ensure standard procedures for alternative care are in place*
  - *Provide psychosocial support for parents/caregivers*
  - *Provide psychosocial support for children and adolescents*
- **Communities of faith can play a role in keeping lines of communication open between their faith group and vulnerable children:**
  - *Example: Child-friendly spaces, in which children can talk about their experiences, may help identify safeguarding issues at home, as well as other problems relating to child protection and well-being. Although in-person child friendly spaces will not be possible with isolation orders from national authorities, they may be possible in adapted ways through other channels of communication. The World Council of Churches<sup>174</sup> seeks to do create safe and child-friendly spaces through the following Principles and Tools for Child Friendly Churches:*
    - *The church needs to make it possible for girls and boys to participate in decisions and activities affecting their lives.*
    - *The church needs to do everything possible to protect children.*
    - *The church needs to help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents, and to tell the people in charge of their village/city/country to act when the rights of children and adolescents are not properly respected.*
    - *The church needs to organize projects with boys and girls in the church to help protect our planet and future.*
- **Young people may have particular needs, including advice on how to manage heightened stress, schoolwork, and online interactions.**
  - *Example: It is important to maintain lines of communication during COVID-19. Young people tend to be quite adept at using social media and can help those who aren't to ensure communication amongst communities of faith can continue online. For example, Young Jains of American (YJA) are helping Jain Centers to develop their online pathshala for kids and youth.<sup>175</sup>*
  - *Example: 'Young women and men of faith play an important role in connecting with their peers and communities at large'.<sup>176</sup> Online platforms like whatsapp can help maintain a sense of community and a space to identify and support people facing vulnerabilities.*
  - *Example: Messages coming from young people will be more likely to resonate with their peers. The Network of religious and traditional peacemakers calls on communities and leaders 'to actively partner with youth in developing messages, assisting with the utilization*

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<sup>174</sup> World Council of Churches (2016), "Principles for Child-Friendly Churches" – Explained to 11 to 18-year-old Children and Adolescents", 31 March 2016, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/the-draft-2016principlesfor-child-friendly-churches2016-explained-to-11-to-18-year-old-children-and-adolescents/view>

<sup>175</sup> JAINA: Federation of Jain Associations in North America, Newsletter. [https://www.jaina.org/page/04\\_04\\_2020\\_ENewsletter](https://www.jaina.org/page/04_04_2020_ENewsletter)

<sup>176</sup> Network of religious and traditional peacemakers, Six ways RTA can take action to prevent the spread. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/six-ways-for-religious-and-traditional-actors-to-take-action-to-prevent-spread-of-covid-19-in-their-communities/>

of technology and social media as a connective communication mechanism during this period of social distancing'. Religious leaders and communities of faith can work with and encourage young people to use their social media skills to follow UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram for the latest updates on COVID-19 and share graphics and accurate information with friends.<sup>177</sup>

- *Example: Young people can also create online content to spread accurate information and tackle xenophobic discriminatory comments they encounter online in an appropriate way<sup>178</sup> to help dispel misinformation and challenge stigma. Youth workers are working to dispel a myth among young people in the Northern Territory of Australia that Aboriginal people cannot catch COVID-19 in innovative ways through an online, age-appropriate 'corona cricket' game.<sup>179</sup>*
- Communities of faith are already working to build the capacity and promote meaningful participation of children and youth in decision-making processes and ensure their needs are being met and risks are mitigated. It is important to recognize that children also have agency and while they need to be protected, it is important to listen to them and respect their autonomy so they can exercise their rights. Involving children in religious life and helping them participate in their religious community, shows them they are valued.<sup>180</sup> It is also important to ensure diversity among children and adolescents and ensure all groups, including the most marginalised are engaged in decision-making process
  - *Example: Communities of faith have a potentially important role to play in strengthening children's identities and critical thinking, to empower them to be able to make solid decisions and be involved in decision-making processes. Arigatou International's Learning to Live Together program seeks to do this through nurturing children's ethical values and spirituality and has made available a new COVID-19-adapted version.*
  - *Example: UNICEF Risk Communication & Community Engagement's "Practical Tips on Engaging Adolescents and Youth in the COVID-19 Response" provides guidance about how to reach out to and mobilize young people through relevant media (social media, radio, U-report), partnerships with youth organizations and inclusion in decision-making processes. It also advises on important ethical requirements for participation and on possible joint actions.*
- Religious leaders and communities of faith can use accessible, child- and youth-friendly communication tools about COVID-19 and/or develop their own
  - *Example: There are examples of child- and youth- friendly communication tools about COVID-19 developed by RLs and communities of faith. For instance, Jeunesse Islamique du Cameroun's youth-friendly video "Quelques mesures à respecter pour lutter contre l'épidémie du Coronavirus" explains hygiene and social isolation norms to protect yourself and the others from the spread of the virus.<sup>181</sup> The Indian Government has issued a series*

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<sup>177</sup> UNICEF/Voices of youth, Toolkit to spread awareness and take action on COVID-19  
<https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/take-action-and-help-fight-covid-19>

<sup>178</sup> UNICEF India, Video guidance for creating social media videos in collaboration with UNICEF

<sup>179</sup> ABC NEWS, Coronavirus misinformation in Indigenous communities tackled with 'corona cricket' game,  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-27/teaching-social-distancing-in-remote-communities-for-covid-19/12088700>

<sup>180</sup> Arigatou International, Faith and Children's Rights: A Multi-religious Study on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://arigatouinternational.org/en/what-we-do/faith-children-s-rights-a-study-on-the-crc>, p.24

<sup>181</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/JIC.Cameroun/videos/>

of comics called “Kids, Vaayu & Corona”<sup>182</sup> to facilitate communication about COVID-19 with children, including one scene in which religious leaders from different religious traditions are seen greeting and following guidance on distancing. World Vision have also developed specific visual resources<sup>183</sup> to talk to children about COVID-19. The list of useful resources below also includes child- and youth-friendly tools created by other religious actors.

- UNICEF offers advice to parents and caregivers on how to talk to children about COVID-19:<sup>184</sup>
  1. Ask open questions and listen
  2. Be honest: explain the truth in a child-friendly way
  3. Show them how to protect themselves and their friends
  4. Offer reassurance
  5. Check if they are experiencing or spreading stigma
  6. Look for the helpers
  7. Take care of yourself
  8. Close conversations with care  
(more details in the document)
- The same does the Humanitarian Disaster Institute<sup>185</sup> with its 10 Tips to Help Your Kids Feel Safe, Not Scared :
  1. PREPARE YOURSELF
  2. ENCOURAGE FAITH
  3. PRAY & PREPARE TOGETHER
  4. READ THE BIBLE TOGETHER
  5. BE HOPEFUL
  6. USE AGE-APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE
  7. PROVIDE REASSURANCE
  8. TRY TO MAINTAIN ROUTINES
  9. DISCUSS WHAT THEY ARE HEARING
  10. MONITOR AND LIMIT MEDIA EXPOSURE
- For example, easy read version on life-saving messages: Please see materials in different accessible formats developed by members of International Disability Alliances<sup>186</sup>
- Communities of faith and local religious leaders play an important role in helping children cope with stress through Mental Health and Psychosocial support
  - Example: There are several resources that religious leaders and communities of faith can access to deal with stress experienced by children as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging Minds have developed tools not only for parents<sup>187</sup> (including on the importance

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<sup>182</sup> Government of India, “Kids, Vaayu & Corona: Comic Book for Children to Provide Correct Information about COVID-19” [https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/Corona\\_comic\\_PGI.pdf](https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/Corona_comic_PGI.pdf)

<sup>183</sup> World Vision, Child-Friendly Resources. <https://app.box.com/s/bw20lvpxd6gle2nix6wbpezag9dtreou>

<sup>184</sup> UNICEF, How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>185</sup> Humanitarian Disaster Institute . “How to talk to your kids” (Christian resource) <https://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Tip-Sheet-How-to-Talk-to-Your-Kids-About-Coroavirus.pdf>

<sup>186</sup> <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/covid-19-ida-members>

<sup>187</sup> Emerging Minds, Helping children cope with stress during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak – factsheet. <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/helping-children-cope-with-stress-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>

of play) but also for journalists and media professionals<sup>188</sup> to keep children's mental wellbeing in mind when reporting about traumatic events and disasters. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network<sup>189</sup> offers advice and guidance on how to communicate with children, for instance asking them about what they have seen on the TV/Internet and to express their feelings through drawings. WHO's Helping Children Cope With Stress During the 2019-nCoV Outbreak<sup>190</sup> condenses important strategies in a one-page document which can be easily circulated and includes recommendations on increased and sensitive communication with children, extra needs for carers' attention, and for a regular routine in the absence of schooling.

- Religious leaders and communities of faith are uniquely positioned to continue providing spiritual support for children, finding innovative ways to support children's spiritual nurture in virtual and alternative ways. Religious leaders and communities of faith can also support parents to be able to deliver spiritual support at home
  - As Arigatou's messages<sup>191</sup> suggest, communities of faith, religious leaders, parents and caregivers can provide private or online spaces where children can foster their spiritual well-being during social isolation. In fact, this can be an occasion to strengthen one's own faith and a sense of connection with one's spiritual community.: "Using time in confinement to practice prayer and meditation, spiritual closeness and solidarity with others can strengthen our own faith. Religious communities can offer virtual spaces and online support to pray, listen to one another, and strengthen the sense of community."
- Communities of faith support parents, as well as children, to ensure a safe and positive environment for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Section 5: Links to Resources

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<sup>188</sup> Emerging Minds, Traumatic events, the media and your child – factsheet.

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/traumatic-events-the-media-and-your-child/>; see also UNICEF, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic: A Handbook for Journalists. <https://www.unicef.org/india/reports/covid-19-handbook-journalists>

<sup>189</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak\\_factsheet\\_1.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf)

<sup>190</sup> WHO, Helping Children Cope with Stress. [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2)

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# Where to go for further information/links to resources

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## Baha'i

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## Section 4: Spiritual well-being, resilience, empathy, and community service

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