

Pastoral concerns:
Burial of the dead in a time of contagions
by The Rev Richard Munsell

1. Concentric circles of concern:
 - a. Deceased remains
 - i. How long is virus able to infect others from remains?
 1. Family
 2. Clergy
 3. Morticians (most likely best prepared by their industry)
 4. Worship areas
 - ii. What is the effect of embalming on virus – Does it render remains safe?
 1. Differentiation: dealing with a virus vs bacteria
 - iii. Distinctions of how remains are presented
 1. Open casket – risk would seem highest
 2. Closed casket – risk would seem lower except for contact by mourners
 3. Cremations – risk would seem lowest except for contact by mourners.
 - b. Family
 - i. If they have cared for/mourned with deceased, are they potential carriers of virus?
 - ii. Pastoral need to celebrate loss/hope of resurrection/funeral
 1. Community, family, clergy as centers of resiliency in times of crisis
 - iii. Could family/mourners be a factor of viral spread to others
 1. Non exposed family
 2. Clergy
 3. Worship communities
 4. Worship areas
 - c. Clergy
 - i. If exposed to body or grieving family, do they become potential carrier of virus?
 1. To congregants
 2. To Worship areas
 3. To their personal clergy family members
 - ii. Side Question: Safety of Clergy doing pastoral ministry in medical facilities
 - d. Worship areas
 - i. If funeral is held in a worship area, how long is virus considered viable/able to infect others in that area?
 1. Challenge of cleaning Worship areas post funeral prior to other liturgical events in worship areas
 - ii. Advisability of a graveside only policy: to diminish contact/exposure
 - iii. Potential for burial now and worship liturgy at future (post-viral) time
 - e. Grave side gatherings

- i. Potential of viral spreading may still be issue
 - 1. Family
 - 2. Mourners
 - 3. Clergy
 - ii. Secondary effects: those who attend becoming carriers of virus to others not attending
- 2. Being prepared for rejection
 - a. If clergy has pastoral contact with persons who are or may be infected, will clergy become carriers of the virus, will others in their community avoid contact out of fear clergy may now be carriers of virus?
- 3. Guidance:
 - a. State authorities
 - i. Does the Department of Health offer guidelines for how to handle issues in a time of pandemic?
 - b. Mortuary industry
 - c. Possibly holding cremains at church (sacred space) until memorial could be celebrated at safer date.

Prayer:

Lord, God, you are the Divine Physician, who made us and calls us to walk in your way. May you guide your people in ways of love, wisdom, and compassion. Humbly we ask your presence to be with all healthcare providers, responders, and ministers. Our hearts go out to those who suffer, die, and mourn. Bless us with healing in this time of need. Help us to find strength in our love of you and love of one another.