Being Safe while Helping in Your Community:
Volunteering in a Time of Social Distancing

During this national emergency, the New England Conference Disaster Response and Mission office has begun receiving requests from our Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) partners for local volunteers especially from shelters in some states and food banks or other food distribution locations and ministries (food pantries, Meals on Wheels, school meal providers, etc.) in most states. We will be distributing these opportunities for service as soon as we have more information, and in some cases, we will only distribute them within the districts where there is a need expressed.

As you all know, mission journeys outside our communities is not advised or allowed in most states.

But we want to provide the safety guidelines and resources we have found and followed. All volunteer activities should adhere to critical health and safety protocols, in order to protect each other, volunteers, residents, those we serve and our churches and social service agencies with which we work.

We do not pass on volunteer requests lightly, nor without reiterating cautions that have been in place and are more important as this virus spreads.

Volunteer guidelines that may change as the situation evolves.

- First, DO NO HARM
- ASK: Is it safe? How are we/they minimizing risk?
- Is the skill set needed well defined? What skill levels are needed?
- Is request need-driven? In response to valid mission requirements. Without volunteers, what will result?
- Respond LOCALLY when possible: Matching local resources to local need first. Supporting the various Governors’ Executive Orders minimizing travel.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) have the most updated information regarding preparedness and prevention. Global Ministries’ Global Health unit is monitoring these recommended protocols carefully.

General Guidelines for Volunteers:

**DO NOT** attempt to volunteer if you have:
- Experienced symptoms that could be related to COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Been around anyone who has COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- Traveled to any foreign country in the last 14 days
- Been on a cruise or been in an airport in the last 14 days
- Been to an event where more than 10 people were in attendance in the last 14 days

**DO NOT** self-deploy to volunteer for any activity without confirming that there is a need for the activity, that it will be conducted, and that volunteer support is needed and expected.

**DO NOT** consider volunteering if you live with or are in frequent contact with people in the higher-risk categories for the virus.
ASK about any risk that may be associated with the task and DO NOT take part if you are uncomfortable with the level of risk.

DO practice universal infection control precautions.

- Clean and wash your hands with soap and water before, during, and after volunteering for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid physical contact with others and maintain a social distance of 6 feet.
- Cover your cough and sneezes with your elbow or tissue.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

DO call ahead to the service agency and ask if any additional safety precautions should be taken before, during and after the shift.

DO allow for extra time for additional screening from volunteer organizations or agencies to make sure you are cleared to volunteer for the task.

DO clean any used spaces thoroughly before and after. “High touch” surfaces that volunteers may encounter should be cleaned every day. These include counters, door handles, tabletops, bathroom fixtures, toilets, telephones, keyboards, tablets, and remote controls.

DO use proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if needed/provided for the task.

DO maintain the social distancing of 6ft apart ESPECIALLY when interacting with general public through meal pickups and deliveries. This is critical given the shortage of masks.

DO expect that shifts or opportunities may be cancelled; especially volunteer opportunities working with the vulnerable populations. Please be gracious and understanding.

DO register your capabilities and availability or find volunteer opportunities that may be available in your area.

General Guidance for Volunteer Organizations:

Realize that traditional services may shift.

Clean and sanitize gathering spaces or meal distribution sites regularly. Dispose of cleaning materials properly and contain any contaminated materials.

Do not compete in the market for scarce supplies that healthcare organizations and providers need every day to perform their duties.

If congregating is necessary for your task, consult local public health partners and exercise extra measures.

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Keep 6-10 foot social distance rules in place during tasks, if possible.

Hang posters in facilities with best practices / social distancing / hand washing etc. There are World Health Organization posters here if you scroll down.

Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues).

Provide disinfecting wipes and receptacles for their disposal in all locations.
  - When in doubt visit CDC for recommendations.

For distribution/delivery:
  o For people receiving meals from a distribution point, if a line forms there needs to be chalk or tape on the ground that reminds people to keep at least a 6ft distance.

For people who are giving meals, they also need to find a way to maintain at least 6ft if possible, use gloves, and wash hands with soap and water frequently.
  o With deliveries, setting meals or supplies on the doorstep and waving and holding conversation from that safe distance to protect the seniors and homebound vulnerable folks is key.

Make sure all volunteers understand any risks associated with the task you would like them to do and be understanding if they are not comfortable with that level of risk.

Screen all volunteers and clients as able before allowing them to do the tasks.
  o It is recommended to do temperature checks as volunteers come in for shift, especially if handling food.
  o Consider having an isolation space ready in case anyone shows up with symptoms.

Realize that many volunteers are over age 65 and at a higher risk for contracting the virus.

Make sure you have the proper PPE available and make sure you train volunteers on its proper use before allowing them to do any tasks that require PPE.

For background and the most up-to-date information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Coronavirus Disease 2019 website: HERE

Also, your state health departments will have information:
State of Maine COVID-19 information
Information from the Rhode Island Department of Health
State of New Hampshire COVID-19 information
State of Vermont COVID-19 information
Commonwealth of Massachusetts COVID-19 information
State of Connecticut COVID-19 information

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