

## Praying, Grieving, and Other Social Gatherings During COVID-19

The Coronavirus is very contagious. The world is currently experiencing a global pandemic that is affecting every aspect of people's lives, including praying, social and meal-time gatherings for important religious holidays, burial rituals, and grieving for every religion.

You are the expert in your community and know best how to create change locally. Here is a guide to addressing prayer, grief, and social gatherings during this time:

- Create a daily community ritual to show that all community members can safely participate in. For instance, in some places at a certain time of day, people sing a message of unity while making noise or playing instruments. This creates a sense of community even if we can't be physically close to each other.
- If you are healthy and no one in your home is sick, you can continue to perform charitable acts during this time. Be sure to stay 2 meters from anyone who does not live in your home.
- Many religions have regular social and meal-time gatherings, like breaking the daily fast during Ramadan and Shabbat dinner. During the current global pandemic of Coronavirus, these activities can continue with only those living in your home. Larger social gatherings could contribute to the spread of the virus in your community. This has happened in some countries.
- Burial rituals are very important to every community. At this time, it is important to adjust these rituals in order to protect healthy community members.
- Speaking with religious leaders and traditional healers in your community will be important in order to adjust burial and prayer rituals. Discuss with your religious leaders:
  - The information you know about COVID-19. You can share other iACT resources if needed.
  - How can we honor daily and weekly prayers while remaining 2 meters apart from each other? Create recommendations together and ask how you can support their efforts.
  - How can we honor the burial rituals of our friends and family without bringing the community physically close together? What alternative rituals can we create that keeps everyone safe?
- If there are multiple religions in your community, bring religious leaders (formal and informal) from the different faiths together for a meeting to discuss an inter-faith collaboration around these important decisions. During the meeting, remember to stay 2 meters apart and to cover your mouth and nose with a mask, cloth, or scarf.

### Important Messages from Our Religious Leaders Around the World:

*"The suspension of the communal prayers in the masjids, and all religious activities in person, is a necessary matter in light of the overall goals of the Shari'ah, and not only is there no sin in doing so, rather it is sinful to flout such regulations and bring risk to oneself and to others. Of the primary goals of the Shari'ah is the preservation of life; and this ban is not a ban on actual prayer (which is an individual obligation on a person), but on the communal prayer (which according to the majority of scholars is not an individual obligation, and can be lifted for many reasons, including slight hardship). This suspension should remain until medical experts give indications that it can be lifted. This is a matter for medical experts to assess, not religious authorities."*

- The Fiqh Council of North America

*"WCC [World Council of Churches] general secretary Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit and the moderator of the WCC Central Committee Dr. Agnes Abuom urged people and churches to give highest priority to "doing whatever we can do to protect life" and "ask churches not to have public services...as this can become hubs of transmission of the virus" and to follow strictly the rules and guidelines from authorities based on World Health Organization guidelines."* - World Council of Churches (WCC)

*"We must also remember that nobody is free of suffering, and extend our hands to others who lack homes, resources or family to protect them. This crisis shows us that we are not separate from one another—even when we are living apart. Therefore, we all have a responsibility to exercise compassion and help. [...] I sincerely hope that everyone can stay safe and stay calm. At this time of uncertainty, it is important that we do not lose hope and confidence in the constructive efforts so many are making."* - Dalai Lama

*"One finger does not pick up flour, teaches an African Proverb. Let us therefore unite to drive this dreadful scourge with its unfortunate consequences out of our country and out of the world [...] [it] has harmful consequences on the health, socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual levels."* - Cardinal Philippe Nakellentuba Ouédraogo, President of Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar