



The Challenge of Sustaining & Building Community during the Pandemic

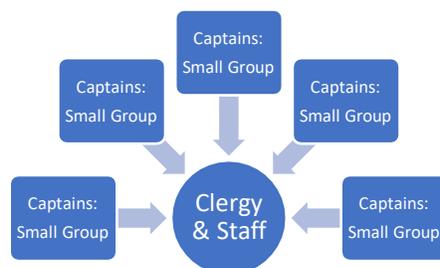
Many clergy have shared with us that they are concerned about the fear and anxiety their people are feeling around Covid-19, especially at a time when clergy and congregations cannot come together physically to support and console one another. The isolation from loved ones that physical distancing and quarantines have imposed can compound congregational members' anxiety with a sense of feeling lonely and unmoored.

How can our faith communities continue to be 'community', showing up with and for one another during this unsettling season? In addition to providing online worship services, many congregations have identified staff to field calls from members in need of support. Other congregations have their staff proactively calling through their member-contact lists to touch base with their people. These are good first steps in responding to the need for all of us to feel supported by our faith community in these trying times.

But can we reimagine how we approach this? What if we decentralized the work of maintaining contact, caring for one another, and deepening relational networks during the pandemic? What if we could find a way to build community so that we actually emerge from the crisis even more unified and connected than before?

Building "Caring Circles" within your Congregation

Faith in Indiana has been encouraging clergy to think about the human capital that is present within a faith community, and to think less vertically and more horizontally about how to provide information and support (emotional, spiritual, physical) to congregational members during this period. We are proposing that clergy move to create "Caring Circles" within the larger congregation to share information and create a deeper sense of connection and support through weekly video or telephone calls.



Eight Steps to create and sustain "Caring Circles" within your congregation:

- 1) Inform your congregation that you are seeking to build small "Caring Circles" in which members will check in with one another regularly and seek to support one another during this difficult time
- 2) Recruit members to serve as team captains, either by issuing an invitation and asking people to step forward or by reaching out directly to certain leaders in the congregation
- 3) Divide your congregation into small groups of 7-10 people; you may want to work through existing ministry groups or program committees, or create entirely new small groups
- 4) Assign 1-2 team captains to each small group; ask them to poll members of their group to identify a good day and time for a weekly meeting of their "Caring Circle"
- 5) Ask captains to schedule weekly meetings via video calls on Zoom.com (much better for creating a sense of connection) or via a telephone conference line. See below for more information on this step.

- 6) Make sure team captains are prepped to lead weekly phone calls/video calls and have reliable information to share
- 7) Reach out to your local FIA federation for support with training, coaching and information
- 8) Convene team captains and clergy/staff for a weekly joint call to debrief, share information and prepare for the following week's call

Parts of a Weekly “Caring Circle” Call

Prayer/Reflection: Is there a sacred text, prayer or message that all of the teams can use each week to center and encourage group members?

Check-in: How are members of the team doing?

Mutual Aid: How can we support one another this week? Do members of the team need prayer, food/shopping assistance, medications, or other support?

Information: Updates on public health guidance & congregational news

Analysis: Is the federal/state/local public policy response meeting the needs of all of our people?

Action: If there are gaps in the public policy response, how can we mobilize our voices to secure a just response?



Opportunity for Partnership with your Local Federation/Organizer

Your local Faith in Indiana federation may be able to help you support your Caring Circle team captains. Organizers can help clergy and congregations by:

- Coaching team captains to facilitate their small groups
- Providing reliable public health information
- Sharing an analysis of federal, state and local public policy responses to the pandemic
- Helping mobilize for collective action around shared concerns

Reach out to your federation staff to share your plan and ask for support if you need it.

Technology Needs

For video conference calls:

- Set up a congregational Zoom Pro account for online video meetings at Zoom.com for about \$15 a month
- Assign a staff person to coordinate calendaring of Zoom calls with team captains
- Team captains share call info (date, time, access information) to group members via email or text

For telephone conference calls:

- Team captains can set up a no-cost conference call line for their small group via FreeConferenceCall.com or UberConference.com
- Team captains share call info (date, time, access information) to group members via text or email

If your captains need training in using Zoom, sign-up for ‘Virtual Office Hours’ held weekly at <https://faithinindiana.org/take-action/calendar/#!calendar> or Adriana Zermeno at adriana@faithindiana.org. Additional training to support Caring Circles contact your local community Organizer, <https://faithinindiana.org/who-we-are/staff/>