



REGION 1 HAMMER & DANCE

July 15, 2020

United for Ministry in the Days of COVID-19.

The Social Service Agencies
and Synods of Region 1.

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Our social service agencies and churches have invested significant energy in adapting to “stay at home” and social distancing orders. We have learned how to work from home; service our clients with tele-medicine; use ZOOM (for heaven’s sake!); and we have learned there is a price to pay for such adaptations. We are indeed social creatures after all and healing; hope and happiness depend on a kind of real presence. It is no surprise that given the green flag people have flocked to social settings and opportunities. We all long to return to “normal.”

The notion of the “[hammer and dance](#)” is that there is no straight line to “normal.” We see today how those who took on the two-step early must now do-si-do and promenade home again. Businesses, churches, offices, and bars may have to close in the fall, or repeatedly, or right now. What we thought might be a calm COVID summer with a possible “second wave” this fall is just a flood – and it is not receding!

Square dancers know when you “do-si-do” you “pass back to back and return to your original place.” This issue of the *Hammer and Dance* invites you to do-si-do with anticipation!

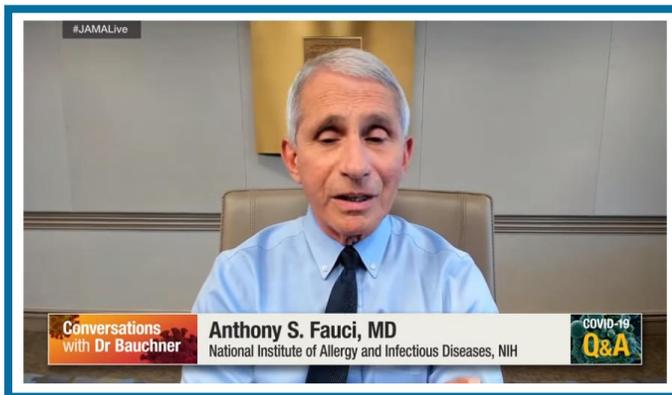


This Week:

**What do we do
when it is time to
close up again?**

Amid COVID-19 resurgence, fewer deaths. Dr. Fauci explains why.

(Title above, and interview below, are both linked for reading or viewing if curious. Not essential reading.)



Everybody had hoped for a “slower summer” around coronavirus infections with the possibility of a “second wave” this fall. Quite the contrary, infection rates are currently raging and this is *not* a second wave. It is the result of poor handling of current realities.

At the same time, many states, businesses, services and churches have begun to re-open. This includes some congregations of

Region 1 and various services of LSS of Alaska and LCSNW. What does this mean?

Almost certainly this means sooner or later we’ll have to “*pass back to back and return to our original places.*” In plain English this means congregations which have re-engaged face to face worship will have to close their doors again. Clients we have begun to serve with limited personal presence again we may have to return to tele or virtual support. How are we to engage such ‘reversals?’ This may be especially hard to do.

The Situation

1. **People have been told, or wish to believe, there is a COVID cure/vaccine right around the corner. Or, that the virus will soon disappear.**
2. **Some individuals associate “mask wearing” or public health advice with partisan politics.**



3. **We just need to be with people!**

To Consider

1. **It is important to keep official CDC and state agency information front and center. Nobody knows the future, but medical professionals are *not* telling us that there is a cure or vaccine right around the corner. It *is* going to be a while.**
2. **Public health is not a partisan issue even if those around us try to make it so. As Christians it is important to stay grounded in our mission to care for our neighbor. This is not about just us.**
3. **Our need for community is great. We can be present for each other by phone and video conferencing, but the ‘human touch’ really is important. Phone may be the best means to contact older members or clients at present, but as time goes by we will increasingly be looking for options.**

Already Adapting



Have congregations found new, COVID appropriate ways to worship? Yes! Have we invested in ZOOM meetings, ZOOM visits, tele-health engagements and lots of phone calls? Yes! Can we pray through windows, leave food at the doorstep, and celebrate the Eucharist online? Yes, yes and yes! We have done this, and so much more. Some, however, wonder how long this can continue.

Of all that we have learned, what is temporary and what might be our new normal? **It would be good to share and catalog new learnings!**

When and how will we know we're "back" or that the pandemic is "over"? We never did find a vaccine for HIV. That is still with us. This may be true of COVID as well. **It would be good to establish at least temporary indicators of when to "go" and when to "pull back."** State, federal and even CDC recommendations may not provide us the guidance we need for church or Social Service Agency decisions. We are in the world, but not of it.

And it hasn't all been ZOOM worship, PPP and tele-health. Our original reaction to COVID found corporate, government, pastoral and ecclesiastical authorities guiding the ship. Now we see more testing around the edges, at the grass roots. For example, as care facilities open up, do pastors go and visit members who have endured lengthy isolation? With testing, tracking and tracing we may be able to nuance face to face interactions. For ministries and services that engage people face to face, what might you want to think about? **(This is not an endorsement of such practices, but a recognition that they are happening.)**

Face to Face Visitation. What should we consider?

Not answers, but the kind of questions those who visit might begin to ask.

Question

1. How many people will I visit at once?

Always wash your hands before and after any visit. Have hand sanitizer readily available.

2. Will you be indoors or outside?

Major Consideration

Visiting a single, shut-in, client or member carries less risk than 3 or 4. Total number of visits in a month, even one to one, also increases exposure.

Meet on a porch or backyard if possible. Outside visits are inherently less risky than in smaller, confined spaces.

Other Thoughts

Visits should never be made contrary to medical advice or without permission and full consent of those being visited or their family.

Indoors, open windows or doors allow for better ventilation and so less risk of infection. Always think about ventilation indoors.

Question

3. Can you maintain safe, social distancing?
4. Will masks be worn?
5. How long will the visit be?
6. Can we celebrate Holy Communion?

Major Consideration

Health officials suggest a minimum of 6 feet distance between people in social settings – masked!

Yes! Masks should be required of all parties any time a face to face visit takes place.

In enclosed spaces the virus load in the air is cumulative with time. Keep indoor visits shorter. Meet outdoors when possible.

Prayer and sacraments are important. The goal is to minimize personal contact and maintain social distancing.

Other Thoughts

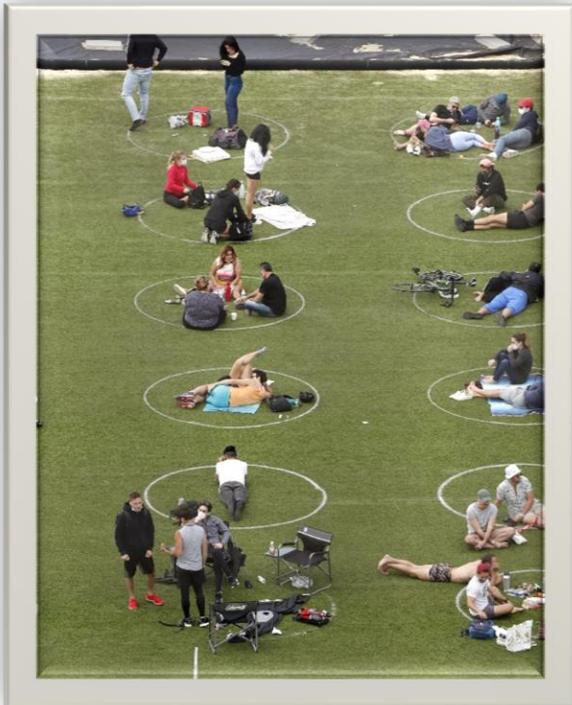
Animated conversation requires increased distancing. There is nothing magic about 6 feet. It is a minimum.

Masks primarily lower the risk of infection for the other person, not the one wearing it.

Those who visit should also give thought to accumulated time overall. How many visits might you do in a month?

For Holy Communion handle the elements as little as possible and set them on a table rather than giving them directly. Prayer should not involve personal contact.

The goal here is **not** to suggest to anyone that they should be doing face to face visits in the current COVID climate. However, some are doing so and as we begin to re-engage in this way, we should talk together about best practices for doing so safely and responsibly.



In Lieu of public worship is face to face small group MINISTRY possible?

Not answers, but the kind of questions we most likely will be asking as time goes by.

Let's think in terms of three years. From now until Easter of 2023 we may need to continue wearing masks in public. Handshakes may all but disappear. Big worship services with pipe organs, brass, handbell choirs and lustful singing will not be possible. Will we worship in this way again in 2021, 2022, 2023? Fund raising events, assemblies and convocations may also have to happen differently for an extended period of time.

Perhaps this is too severe, but we will not be done with our current COVID world tomorrow. For just a moment, image three years. Or, imagine longer.

Most church buildings have large gathering spaces – sanctuaries, fellowship halls, gymnasiums, classroom, preschools. Will these sit empty for three years? If they do, will there be anybody to use them again once we “return to normal?”

Offices, medical centers, and restaurants are installing plexiglass dividers, spacing out tables, and redesigning ventilation systems. Businesses are serious about their mission and serving their clientele. It takes investment.



Similarly, [coronavirus bubbles or pods](#) are a social innovations worthy of notice. This is where neighbors, families, or friends commit to certain public

behaviors and standards with others they choose to meet with more intimately. To keep each other safe, they restrict social interactions in general so that they might safely enjoy social interaction within their bubble. Right now, the weather is good. People can meet outside. Our children can ride bikes with friends in the street. But what about this fall and winter when the weather keeps everybody inside? Could church sanctuaries, fellowship halls or classrooms be adapted for small group interactions?

The goal here is not to suggest programming, but to ask questions. Here is the invitation:

“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.” (1 Cor. 4:1)

1. It appears that COVID will dictate changes lasting at least two year and likely longer. We would all be well served to think in these terms. Some of our more vulnerable clients and members will never see their caseworker or corporate worship again. How will we steward honesty, hope, and imagination?

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” (1 Cor. 4:2)

2. Church buildings are just one example. We are stewards of much for the ministry of all. Will your building, musicians, office space or volunteers be allowed to lay fallow for years? Is that faithful? How can they be repurposed or repointed for vital ministry in a time of great opportunity and need?

“What do you have that you did not receive?

And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor. 4:7)

3. **“The gifts of God for the people of God ...”** In a broken world “returning to normal” is never our goal. The present COVID age invites us to think together, pray together, invest together and minister with creative hearts and minds. Think of us in this way. Not, “Why can’t we do . . .” but, “Look now at what we might do! Who better to lead into the new than those that follow the living Lord Jesus Christ?!”