

An illustration of a hand holding a black sign with white text. The sign is rectangular with a black border. The text on the sign is in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, arranged in four lines: 'LEADERSHIP', 'TEAMWORK', 'SHARED VALUES', and 'COMPANY CULTURE'.

**LEADERSHIP
TEAMWORK
SHARED VALUES
COMPANY CULTURE**

Leadership and Culture

This January

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SARS revisited Church life during an epidemic

The latest news about the coronavirus is not encouraging. Ministers and congregations pondering the implications may be interested in the experience of Kowloon Union Church, 16 years ago, during Hong Kong's epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Wuhan's virus of course is not SARS. Evidently it has a longer incubation period and opinions still differ on the stage at which it becomes infectious. So far, it seems less lethal than SARS and more susceptible to treatment. Wealthy countries like ours are now better prepared to respond. Others of course are not. How the virus may develop remains anyone's guess.

As more cases appear here, churches will need to consider things like:

1. **Church property** – give more attention to hygiene, disinfecting frequently touched things like door handles, switches, telephones, and computer keyboards and their mice. Watch the treatment of food and utensils in kitchens and church halls.
2. **Childcare programs, pre-schools, schools** – follow government advice on measures to be taken, particularly whether to close down.
3. **Other activities** – expect diminished enthusiasm for gatherings of all kinds, with a tendency to cancel or postpone non-essential meetings. Be surprised by the number of meetings deemed non-essential! Use phones and internet instead.



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A hand holding a sign with text. The sign is rectangular with a black border and contains the following text in bold, black, sans-serif font: LEADERSHIP, TEAMWORK, SHARED VALUES, COMPANY CULTURE.

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4. **Worship generally** – attendance may drop. Tell people to stay home if feeling unwell and heed your own advice. Eschew hugs, kisses and handshakes. For passing The Peace, protect your health and enhance your multiculturalism by switching to non-contact forms of greeting like India’s “namaste” or Thailand’s “wai”.
5. **Holy Communion** – take care when preparing bread and wine and suspend the practice of processing the elements to the holy table. The minister presiding should cleanse hands, thoroughly and visibly, immediately before handling the bread and the chalice. Those assisting should do likewise. If a common cup is used, people should receive by careful intinction.
6. **Pastoral care** – needs will increase but opportunities for face-to-face pastoral contact will diminish. Home visits may not be welcomed. Beef up phone and email contacts instead. Hospitals may be quarantined, preventing access to patients. Be especially aware of needs and vulnerability of frontline medical staff, including hospital chaplains.
7. **Stay cool** – if the situation deteriorates some may panic, perhaps exhibiting hostility towards anyone who looks Chinese. Help your congregation stay cool and keep things in perspective.
8. **Look ahead** – people will be anxious, probably fed by alarmist media reporting. Encourage your congregation to look ahead calmly to the return of normality eg start them planning a party to celebrate the pandemic’s end.
9. **Finally** – a gentle cough in even the most crowded bus or train will have your neighbours moving up to give you extra space, so enjoy the compensations and keep smiling!

David Gill
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