



**PRESBYTERIAN
DISASTER
ASSISTANCE**

**Guidance Considerations for Asylum Accompaniment Ministry Teams with
Compañerx in a COVID-19 Environment
June 24, 2020**

WHO THESE GUIDANCE CONSIDERATIONS ARE FOR

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, a program of Presbyterian Church USA, stands with and supports Presbyterians and other people of faith who are called to ministries of accompaniment^{1,2} with detained asylum seekers, or *compañerx*.³ This guidance, which is an expression of that support, is intended to increase the safety and health for:

- *compañerx* released from detention
- accompaniment ministry teams (AMT)
- those providing AMT leadership and support
- groups providing services to *compañerx*.⁴

WHY THE GUIDANCE IS NECESSARY

The COVID-19 pandemic places unique challenges particularly for *compañerx* being released from detention and for AMT. Whether it be transportation, lodging, ensuring access to food and meals, or a combination of these and other forms of accompaniment, great care should be taken to reduce the transmission of the coronavirus to and from *compañerx* and AMT.

GUIDANCE CAVEAT 1

Accompaniment in a COVID-19 world is complex and requires navigating many needs and priorities. In all cases and circumstances described below, the primary goal is for everyone to

¹ Accompaniment is a term widely embraced by Christian communities to move away from more colonial or paternalistic language that puts the volunteer as the hero or savior for coming to the aid of another human being. Accompaniment recognizes that the person providing aid is doing so in solidarity with and alongside another. Accompaniment includes all the ways that people who are part of the settled community (citizens, residents, long stayers) welcome, assist, support and sometimes guide a newcomer in their midst. In this way we acknowledge that even when our neighbors are in vulnerable situations, they remain agents of their own destinies.

² For the full PDA toolkit for congregations in the United States wanting to accompany individuals and families seeking asylum in their journey to find safety and wholeness, click [here](#).

³ In this document, *compañerx* is a gender-neutral term for detained asylum seekers.

⁴ Sections of this document are borrowed and noted from various groups serving *compañerx*. PDA welcomes groups serving *compañerx* to use this document in part or in whole. We would ask only that attributions be given according to use.

feel safe. Fundamental practices such as wearing face masks and practicing social distance are essential.

GUIDANCE CAVEAT 2

COVID-19 is a new (novel) virus. As of this date, leading scientists, the medical community, and public health officials are still learning about it as a pandemic. Therefore, this is a living document. We will modify it periodically and welcome modification suggestions and recommendations from other groups providing similar ministries, especially from feedback they receive from compañerx. Because of the unfolding nature of the pandemic, you would do well to regularly check [CDC guidance documents](#) and follow guidance from local health officials.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED (All are focused specifically on Covid-19 and its implications)

- 1 Detention Center Environments
- 2 ICE Release Policies
- 3 Release and Transportation from Detention Centers
- 4 Lodging Types and Safety Protocols
 - 4.1 Short-term Shelter
 - 4.11 Guidelines for Short Term Shelter
 - 4.2 Quarantine Housing
 - 4.3 Isolation Housing
 - 4.4 Interim and Longer-term Housing
- 5 Food and Meal Provision
- 6 Support Services

1. Detention Center Environments

ICE policies, procedures and protocols are followed according to the interpretation of local and regional leadership, which can vary widely. [ICE's formal COVID-19 guidance](#) states that to prevent the spread of the virus in detention centers and among the general population, compañerx with fever and/or respiratory symptoms are housed separately from general population. Compañerx who are not symptomatic but are at “epidemiologic risk” are said to be housed separately in their own cells or as a group, depending on available space. Because “as a group” housing is allowed in the formal guidance, detention centers may create a hotspot environment for COVID-19 transmission. Existing ICE guidance also addresses the use of Personal Protective Equipment by compañerx this does not always extend to the compañerx who are detained.⁵

2. ICE Release Policies

As noted in the formal guidance, ICE has authority to detain individuals for immigration purposes only. ICE cannot hold any compañerx ordered released by a judge. If ICE must release

⁵ Click [here](#) for detailed and up-to-date information about the spread of COVID-19 in detention centers. PDA is grateful to [Freedom for Immigrants](#) for granting permission to include their COVID-19 IN ICE CUSTODY Biweekly Analysis & Update.

an ill or isolated compañerx, health staff are to immediately notify the local public health agencies to coordinate further monitoring, if required. Please note three important points:

- ICE must release a compañerx if a judge so orders. However, ICE can release anyone it chooses to release *regardless of their physical condition*.
- If ICE must release an ill or isolated compañerx by order, health staff may notify local public health agencies *only if required*. Required by what or by whom is not clear.
- If ICE, on its own volition, releases a compañerx into non-custodial care, there is no guidance regarding notification of local public health agencies.

Therefore, given detention center environments, compañerx are vulnerable to infection from volunteers and that compañerx released from detention may be carrying the virus, even if asymptotically.

3. Release and Transportation from Detention Centers⁶

If your AMT provides transportation from detention centers to airports, bus stations, other commercial transportation options, or lodging, during the COVID-19 pandemic you may want to consider doing what several AMT have done: make a financial arrangement with a drivers-for-hire service. To reduce risks, a good idea is to work with an individual driver who you have vetted for following [CDC transportation guidelines](#). In addition, providing drivers with [travel kits](#) is essential for the compañerx' transition.⁷

4. Lodging

Compañerx released from detention may need lodging for durations as short as one night to longer-term housing, depending upon their ultimate destination. Generally, the shorter the duration, the less complicated it is to secure safe and healthy lodging. For example, if a compañerx needs a night or two of lodging, and if providing short-term shelter is part of your AMT's mission, you may be able to arrange for it with a local hotel in a room with at least a refrigerator and microwave. If a compañerx must wait in the local area for an unknown period, the cost of paying for a hotel room may be prohibitive. If providing transitional and longer-term housing is part of your AMT's mission, alternative housing options may include an empty apartment or an empty room in a house of worship. However, for the health safety for all concerned, direct placement in a private home with others should be an option of last resort.

4.1 Securing Short-term Shelter: Hotel/Motel

If short term shelter is needed (for example, the living situation the compañerx will be moving to is not quite ready to receive them), you'll want to consider if you or your network have trusting relationships with local vendors. Consider what hotel/motel options may be available that match the need for transparency and confidentiality. It is important for a hotel vendor to understand

⁶ PDA is grateful to [Freedom for Immigrants](#), [Physicians for Human Rights](#), and [Women's Refugee Commission](#) for granting permission to include their combined guidance. For a detailed overview of safe release protocols – from pre-release to local transportation to final destination – click [here](#).

⁷ PDA is grateful to [Parish Resource Center](#) for granting permission to include this comprehensive list.

how your AMT may use their facility during the COVID-19 pandemic. These discussion points⁸ can help guide the conversation to level set expectations between both parties:

- Identify yourself by name and ask to speak with the manager or owner.
- Explain that you are with a ministry team from (organization or faith community) and are calling to inquire which local hotels may be available to work with you in the event a compañerx is released and in need a safe environment for a night or two.
- Explain that your AMT would pay for the compañerx room and provide the compañerx with the appropriate support services (including 24/7 availability and meals if this is part of your AMT's services).
- Discuss the process for securing rooms. Among topics to discuss are:
 - How payments would be made.
 - Explain that you often do not know when a compañerx may need a room until the release happens. Ask if this would be an issue or if they have a limit on how many rooms they will provide.
 - Discuss the details of room availability and services:
 - What is the hotel's availability within the immediate timeframe of known releases?
 - Ask about the anticipated rate and reservation process. This is for information and planning purposes only.
 - Can you reach the hotel directly 24/7 or are there certain hours that hotel phones are rolled to the central reservation site?
 - Does the hotel have a restaurant and meal preparation capability?
 - Are there concerns with bringing in food from volunteers or outside vendors?
 - Confirm that accessible rooms are available for individuals who request them. This may include users of mobility equipment and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - Explain that you do not normally cover a compañerx incidentals.
 - Does the hotel have any affiliated properties in the area that might be able to help as well?

4.11 Coordination among AMT, Lodging Staff, and Compañerx

- Everyone (AMT, lodging staff, and compañerx) are trained in current basic COVID-19 protocols (masks, social distancing, frequent washing of hands, etc.)
- AMT communicate with compañerx the safety importance of having no in-room visitors.
- Compañerx and lodging staff agree to call AMT to address any issues. AMT share with the hotel staff their cell phone contact information so everyone knows how to be in communication with each other.
- AMT agrees with compañerx how meals will be managed (delivered by volunteers, delivered by food vendors, etc.) and any diet restrictions. See #5, below, for specific food/meal guidance.
- Lodging staff should provide designated smoking areas.

⁸ Discussion points and guidelines in Sec. 4.1 and 4.11 are adapted from an American Red Cross [COVID-19 guidance](#) document.

- Compañerx are encouraged and supported to engage in social isolation practices and because of their high risk for infection, they should not leave the room during their stay.

4.2 Quarantine Housing⁹

If a compañerx released from detention needs shelter for a period longer than a couple of days and your ministry includes longer-term housing, due to the cost of lodging in a hotel, you might discuss with the compañerx interim housing in a quarantine environment. Quarantine housing protects the compañerx from unnecessary exposure and helps keep them from unknowingly spreading COVID-19. Quarantine must be a minimum of 14 days.

The conversation about quarantine housing (and, if needs be, isolation housing – see Sec. 4.3, below) between the AMT and the compañerx should be approached with great sensitivity and understanding, knowing that any form of extended isolated housing may be extremely difficult for someone having just been released from detention.

Quarantine housing may be secured in a short-term rental or a secure room with a dedicated entrance, kitchenette, and bathroom and shower facilities. Examples of a secure room are private homes with an unused basement with a bathroom and a shower, or an unused room in a house of worship. Most houses of worship have toilets and sinks, but many do not have showers. If a shower is not available, consider purchasing a [portable shower tent](#) in a bathroom using a [portable shower water container](#).¹⁰ Be sure to partner with a compañerx on how to use the equipment and how to dispose of water contained from the shower.

To secure quarantine housing, you may find some of the recommendations in sections 5.1 and 5.11 to be useful. Perhaps AMT members may know of someone or a church willing to make appropriate spaces available. It is important to be transparent about who you and the people you serve are. Also, it is advisable to establish a communication protocol between your AMT, the compañerx, and the owner or overseer of the housing so that any issues may be addressed as they arise. Many of the communication recommendations in Sec. 4.11 can apply to quarantine housing.

Well-stocked quarantine housing would include the following:

- Hand and dishwashing soap
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol
- Tissues
- Latex gloves
- Thermometer
- Trash baskets
- Cloth face coverings
- Cleaning supplies
- Laundry soap

⁹ PDA is grateful to [Asylum Seekers Sponsorship Project](#) for granting permission to include its guidance -- [COVID-19 Release Guidelines](#).

¹⁰ The products noted are examples and not an endorsement or promotion of the particular brands cited.

- At minimum, a radio and, if possible, a TV with cable hook-up
- A temporary cell phone for local contact and emergencies
- Identify activities that the compañerx can engage in while in quarantine or isolation to bring comfort, e.g. music, puzzles, reading, simple exercise equipment, etc.
- Determine how meals will be managed (delivered by volunteers? delivered by food vendors? etc.) See #5, below, for ensuring access to food and meals.
- Clothing and Personal Items
 - NOTE: The clothing and personal items that you provide are one of the first tangible signs that you recognize the humanity and individuality of the compañerx and help restore their sense of dignity. This can be especially important for LGBTQ individuals.
 - Talk with the compañerx about preferred clothing and needed personal items.
 - Consider providing three complete sets of clothing preferred by the person and any personal items identified.

For compañerx living in quarantine housing, it will mean a minimum of 14 days of:

- Staying secluded from others unless you absolutely must leave, such as for essential medical appointments, for which the ministry team may provide transportation
- Using a dedicated bedroom and bathroom
- Not sharing utensils, dishes, cups/glasses, bedding, towels, and other items
- Monitoring your symptoms. Take your temperature twice a day to check for a fever. Be on the lookout for other signs of coronavirus infection, such as dry cough and shortness of breath.
- Getting in touch with your contact from the ministry team to let them know how you are feeling, especially if you have any COVID-19 symptoms
- Clean and disinfect [countertops and other touched surfaces](#) often
- [Wash your hands](#) well with soap often, including after [coughing](#), sneezing, using the bathroom, and before and after eating
- Keep your hands away from your face
- If possible, having in-house laundry facilities would be better than using laundromats. If this is not possible, it is advisable to provide laundry service through volunteers or a professional laundry vendor
 - Launder items according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.
 - Wear disposable gloves when handling dirty laundry from a compañerx who is sick.
 - Dirty laundry from a compañerx who is sick can be washed with other people's items.
 - Do not shake dirty laundry.
 - Use large washable laundry bags to transport the laundry. Wash the bags with the other materials being laundered. If needs be, use and discard large plastic bags to hold the laundry.
 - Remove gloves, and wash hands right away.

4.3 Isolation Housing

If the compañerx in quarantine housing develops COVID-19 symptoms during their quarantine period, then [isolation guidelines](#) must go into effect. These include all of the quarantine housing guidelines but with stricter requirements related to person-to-person presence. While AMT members must observe greater caution in relating to the compañerx, there needs to be increased communication with them. In conversation with each other, the compañerx and AMT will need to determine how meals will be managed (delivered by volunteers, delivered by food vendors, etc.) See #6, below, for specific food guidance.

If symptoms intensify (for example, if there is any signs of respiratory difficulties), put into play a joint, pre-developed rapid medical response plan determining, for example:

- Is emergency medical assistance called or is transportation provided as in Sec. 3? (Note: uniformed emergency rescue personnel may cause re-traumatization.)
- Who calls? The compañerx? The AMT?
- Under what circumstances is the call made?
- Who accompanies to the hospital or other medical arrangements?
- Developing a plan for covering the costs of such care

4.4 Interim and Longer-term Housing

Once the compañerx passes successfully through the quarantine housing period, if the housing situation allows for it, the AMT may wish to negotiate a longer-term agreement with the owner or overseer of the current housing. If this is not possible, the AMT may partner with organizations specializing in providing interim or longer-term housing.

5. Ensuring Access to Food and Meals

Providing food and meals for the compañerx will depend on a variety of factors, including the AMT financial resources, dietary preferences/needs, number and role of volunteers (i.e., do some of the AMT members volunteer to cook meals?), length of housing, its physical space, and its facilities. If a volunteer delivers the food, it should be at a pre-set time or times of the day. The volunteer should wear disposable gloves so the compañerx can see there is no transfer of the virus, and a face mask. The compañerx should also be wearing a face mask. Whether meals are purchased at take-out venues, prepared by volunteers, or groceries prepared by the compañerx, there is a three-step, “no-contact” delivery:

Step 1 knock on the door

Step 2 leave the meal at the door (perhaps sit in on a table outside the door)

Step 3 step back six to 12 feet when compañerx comes to the door.

This allows for appropriate social distance and provides for a good “check-in” time to assess how the compañerx is doing. If the housing situation does not have plates, cups, utensils, etc., the food delivery should be accompanied by paper goods and disposable utensils.

6. Providing Support Services

While transportation, housing, and food/meal services are critically important for basic survival and deeply imbedded in a theology of accompaniment ministries, AMT will be pressed on every side to adequately attend to compañerx released from detention in a COVID-19 world.

Additional considerations which stand outside this guidance but are well within the passion, training, and commitment of AMT include, but are not limited to, the following considerations¹¹:

- Establishing a procedure with the compañerx to transport them if they require greater mental health or medical attention or treatment. (See Sec. 4.3)
- Providing appropriate spiritual care if requested
- Identifying and addressing potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information
- Checking in with compañerx at least daily and proactively support them to practice social distancing.
- Providing PPE for compañerx to use when outside of their rooms, e.g. they need to use common hallway to access the smoking area or during transport.
- Planning for exit from the various housing settings to transportation or other housing

¹¹ For possible additional resources, click [here](#) to see public benefits listed in every state.