



In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Al-Salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatuAllāh! Greetings of peace and Allah’s infinite mercy!

We pray and hope you are in the best of spiritual and physical health. The impact of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is deeply concerning to everyone within the Muslim community. Local scholars, leaders, and health experts are following the situation as closely as possible and keeping a close watch on the developments related to its spread. This document offers a series of recommendations for Muslim institutions in the Chicagoland area based on the deliberations of a body of Islamic jurists, community leaders, medical practitioners and academics, and, most importantly, infectious disease experts.

### **Spiritual Dimensions of COVID-19**

Critical to both our spiritual and physical responses to trials is that they be informed by our theological principles. Since as Muslims we believe that everything that occurs, both the good and bad, is from Allah, we also appreciate that moments of trial and tribulation are simply part of human existence and from divine wisdom. Hence we seek guidance on how to respond to such moments from Allah Himself and through His word in the Quran.

*Surely We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger, and loss in wealth and lives and fruits. But give good tidings to the patient, who, when a suffering visits them, say, “We certainly belong to Allah, and to Him we are bound to return.” They are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy as well; those are the ones who are on the right path. (Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:155–157)*

It is also in Allah’s timeless word that we find instructions to *seek help through patience and prayer, and it is indeed exacting, but not for those who are humble in their hearts, who bear in mind that they are to meet their Lord, and that to Him they are to return.* (Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:45–46). The point is that tests and tribulations demand that we recognize their source and turn back to Him as a result of that recognition, that we draw His attention to our plight, and that we seek His assistance through the performance of good deeds (such as ritual prayer, supplication, charity, feeding the hungry, etc.) as a spiritual remedy to our physical and social conditions.

As Muslims, we must demonstrate our unique theological foundations by responding to crises and changing the affairs of the world in a way that is markedly different from non-believers. Therefore, in addition to the precautionary and preventive measures that we will and ought to take against the virus, we must draw from clear prophetic guidance in such matters –as such guidance is not from this world – and adopt the following spiritual prescriptions along with the recommendations of government and regulatory health authorities.

1. Offer two *raka‘āt* (units) of the *Ṣalāt al-Hājah* (Prayer of Need) daily and supplicate to Allah that He protect us from this and all other illnesses and diseases.
2. Recite Sūrat Yā Sīn daily in the morning.

3. Increase weekly charity spending (*ṣadaqah*).
4. Offer the sacrifice of an animal for the sake of Allah within the next ten (10) days with the intention of averting Allah's wrath through the sacrifice.
5. Spread this message everywhere in the world.

### **The Issue of the Friday (*Jumu'ah*) Congregation**

There can be no doubt that the most important deed in Islam is the ritual prayer, and since Friday is the most meritorious of days, a special congregational prayer was mandated for this day. It is also clear that the bigger the congregation of the Friday prayer, the more the reward. The convergence of people from all areas and backgrounds, the young and old, the rich and the poor, the educated and the layperson, is all possible and desirable on the occasion of the *Jumu'ah* prayer. This convergence of people from all walks of life is rich with spiritual secrets and is emblematic of Islam.

Legally, the *Jumu'ah* prayer is an individual obligation on every sane, male adult who is not a traveler (*musāfir*) and is in sound health. It is therefore not an obligation upon women, children, the sick, the mentally insane, or the very frail. For everyone else, in the absence of a valid excuse, missing the *Jumu'ah* prayer is considered a significant transgression (*fisq*). Thus, when calls are made for suspending this emblematic prayer or restrictions are imposed on those who wish to fulfill their obligation to Allah, it is natural for any person of faith to be disturbed.

It is true that a reasonable excuse may lift the individual obligation of the prayer. Such excuses include illness, heavy rain, the need to care for a sick person, or the fear of attack by an enemy. Similarly, the fear of contracting an illness or exacerbating one's symptoms would relieve a person of the obligation to attend the *Jumu'ah* prayer. However, to overturn a communal obligation for the entire community requires compelling evidence, including the legal argument based on general affliction (*'umūm al-balwā*), which posits that when an affliction becomes so widespread that it affects the generality of the people, rulings can change and dispensations be offered. Similarly compelling evidence may be an overwhelming trial, or *fitnah*, which puts lives at credible risk.

### **The Issue of COVID-19**

In dealing with the issue of widespread disease and its potential to do harm in congregational settings like the *Jumu'ah* prayer, one must differentiate between two related matters: the risk of transmission to others and the risk to one's own health.

The risk of transmission is managed by such population control measures as isolating cases, social distancing, surveillance, and quarantining. At present, the challenge for COVID-19 is that people can be carriers/vectors of the disease prior to having overt symptoms. So, they might not have a fever, cough, or other overt symptoms yet still be a carrier of the disease and be unknowingly infecting others. Transmission of COVID-19, to the best of current medical knowledge, takes place primarily through respiratory droplet transmission from infected individuals (during coughing, sneezing, etc.) and others either inhale these or touch surfaces where they are present and then unwittingly touch their mouth, nose, and eyes, thereby introducing the virus into their own respiratory tracts. The disease spreads quite quickly and the virus is hardy, surviving for a while on surfaces and in the air.

Research data is still coming out and being analyzed, and there are a lot of societal and individual-level risk factors to be considered. Public health authorities are estimating the risk of mortality (death) from the disease on a population level. Furthermore, there are several groups of individuals at increased risk of having more severe symptoms and of dying:

- The elderly
- Immunocompromised individuals
- Those with lung/breathing disorders (asthma, COPD, and the like)
- Those with multiple chronic diseases (diabetes, heart disease, cancer)

Responses to each of these different risks are calculated, strategic, and specific to locales and populations. Ideally, a policy addresses both. However, those are blunt instruments. For example, full quarantine restricts transmission and by extension reduces morbidity at a population level. However, case-based analysis can lead to finer policies (e.g., don't fly if you have higher risk of morbidity). At present, social distancing is being advocated on a population-level because other tools to control the spread of the disease, like vaccines, are not yet available, and there is no known direct cure for COVID-19. Moreover, hospital capacities to care for those who become ill with COVID-19 may quickly be exhausted if the disease afflicts large swaths of the population.

### **Combining Science and Scripture**

First, we have to decide if we meet the threshold for overturning Jumu'ah due to large-scale credible risk or incapacity. The mortality rate may or may not reach the *ḍarūrah*/life-threat threshold. Firstly, it's not a dominant probability of individual death or even harm by simply praying in congregation.

Islam recognizes the position of government and authority. If a state authority compels that Jumu'ah not be performed, then it cannot be established. This may be the case in some countries, and even some cities if legislated. In the U.S., some states have prohibited gatherings of more than 1000, and in others gatherings of 250 individuals. These are rules that ought to be abided by. In other areas such regulations are only a recommendation. Specific contexts generate specific responses.

In the absence of the above, it is imperative to act with a motivation to avert harm and facilitate (*taysīr*), but also to maintain the emblems of the faith as much as possible. For this reason, we do not recommend the outright suspension of the Friday congregational prayers until governmental regulatory bodies restrict such congregations and bar the places of worship from congregational activities. Indeed logic and law dictate that if the state allows business gatherings or educational gatherings up to a certain number of individuals, then religious gatherings should be treated in similar fashion.

At the same time, in a situation as complex as that of the current COVID-19 crisis, in which general harm is highly probable, it is admittedly fair to highlight that the general principle at play is that of precaution (*iḥtiyāt*). Due to the nature of the disease, determining who is infected with COVID-19 and what dispensations and obligations apply to them is not ascertainable with a high degree of certainty. Best policy recommendations on how to deal with the disease are therefore informed by the dominant assumptions of health experts along with Muslim jurisconsults.

We would also like to acknowledge that, to the present date of the formulation of this document, there have not been any reported cases of COVID-19 in the Chicagoland Muslim mosque communities. However, there are cases in the larger community and transmission is expected. The situation is rapidly changing, and in the process of producing these recommendations, the directions from the Governor and Illinois Department of Public Health have been reviewed. As this is a unique and fluid situation, it may be assumed that the below recommendations will change in the coming days or weeks.

### **Best Practices for Jumu'ah Prayer**

We acknowledge that some Islamic scholars and religious leaders have suspended Jumu‘ah entirely. They have done so in light of their reading of the scriptural evidence, legal precedent, and recommendations of public health officials. This stance is actionable.

While we empathize with these precautions, and find them to have religious and scientific merit, we do not yet recommend the wholesale suspension of Jumu‘ah prayers in the masjids and closing off the places of worship for those who are obligated to attend the Jumu‘ah prayers in congregation. We do, however, recommend that the Jumu‘ah prayers be offered only to the extent that the mandatory components of the prayer are fulfilled.

Since the following groups of individuals will not be Islamically obligated to attend the Jumu‘ah prayer in the masjid, they should avoid attending altogether:

1. Women
2. Children
3. Mentally disabled
4. Travelers
5. Anyone with chronic medical conditions
6. Anyone exhibiting symptoms of an illness, such as fever, cough, sore throat, or respiratory ailments.

Congregants exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 (even if they have yet to be formally diagnosed) and congregants suffering from any respiratory disease **ought to remain home** from the Jumu‘ah prayer. The elderly and immunocompromised who are not yet infected are **encouraged to remain home** and avoid gatherings such as the Jumu‘ah prayer. Healthy adult congregants who have a reasonable fear of contracting COVID-19 are **excused from attending Jumu‘ah prayer** and may pray in smaller gatherings where such a fear does not exist or may perform the Zuhr prayer at home. We do not recommend masjids outright close the doors for prayer until a government injunction requires them to do so.

We additionally recommend that the prayer timings be shortened to approximately a five (5) minute *khutbah* (Friday sermon) and *ṣalāt*, with only the *farḍ* portion of the prayer performed in the masjid and the *sunnah* prayers offered at home. The minimum requirements of the *khutbah* and prayer will suffice, which include the *ḥamd* (praise of Allah), the *ṣalāt* (sending blessings) upon the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), the recitation of some Quranic verses, a brief *du‘ā* (supplication), and then two short *raka‘āt* (units of prayer).

If possible, the masjid should try to increase the number of *khutbahs* and prayer services to reduce the number of congregants in each group. The services should be spaced apart (by a minimum of twenty (20) minutes) to allow people to come and leave with minimal physical contact and to allow the prayer space to air out in between the prayers. If possible, there greater distance should be created between the rows of congregants.

If prayers can be offered in an open area, such as a large field, garden, school field, gym, etc., to allow for better airflow, this will minimize risk. Whether indoors or outdoors, we recommend congregants bring their own prayer rugs. Upon returning home, we recommend thoroughly washing one’s hands, face, and exposed body parts, as well as prayer rugs. Given concerns about community transmission, one who ventures outside should adopt these precautions to protect members of their household and themselves.

We recommend that the masjid leadership try to provide hand sanitizer and tissues for the congregants and make them readily available, and where possible and needed provide gloves. Make sure to cover up

an unexpected cough or sneeze and throw away used tissues in the trash. Wash your hands afterward with soap. The CDC recommends washing hands with soap for at least twenty seconds.

Congregants should practice social distancing and avoid shaking hands, hugging, or sharing utensils. They should thoroughly wash their hands, at home, prior to and upon completion of the Jumu'ah prayer. Congregants should be encouraged to perform their ritual ablution (*wuḍū'*) at home and to pray the *sunnahs* before and after the Jumu'ah prayer at home.

With duas and regards,  
Shaykh Amin Kholwadia