

A message from Bishop Hughes:

Common sense steps to lower infection risks at Holy Communion and all church activities

February 28, 2020

Dear Companions on the Journey of Faith,

As the second wave of flu season continues, the increase in news reporting about COVID-19 coronavirus gives us an opportunity to make sure we are taking necessary steps to lower risk of infection as we gather for worship, fellowship, and ministry.

In some ways the potential for an unknown illness can ignite an already heightened sense of anxiety that pervades the time we live in. I encourage you to remember that for centuries the faithful have gathered for prayer, breaking of the bread, learning, and fellowship. Though wars, epidemics, market crashes, disasters, and all manner of calamity. No matter what God seems to meet us just where we are physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Below are steps you have probably taken in the past and that I encourage you to take at this time to lower risk of infection.

- **If you are sick, stay home until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (*without* the use of fever reducers).** Clergy and lay leaders will need to be prepared to find substitutes for Sunday morning ministries, and coverage for church office staff during the week. Consider how to keep tabs on home-bound parishioners, and how to reach out to those who stay home sick.
- **Use good hand washing practices.** Studies show that most people do not wash their hands long enough. Use the Center for Disease Control recommended hand washing guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing>).
- **Churches will need to make hand-sanitizer widely available in all areas of the church** including the chancel. A sanitizer with a minimum 60% alcohol-based is best for our purposes.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Provide tissues, as well as covered, foot-activated bins for their disposal, and hand sanitizer to use afterwards.
- **If certain liturgical practices are a concern, consider safe alternatives.** At the passing of the Peace, bowing or waving is an acceptable substitute for shaking hands or hugging. At Communion, it is acceptable to receive only the bread, but intinction is discouraged. Those giving Communion should do so with clean hands and wipe the chalice thoroughly between sips; chalices should be washed with soap and water afterwards.

Most of us have followed these protocols before with the H1N1 virus. Some of us observe them during every cold and flu season. When each of us takes these commonsense steps, we help each other to stay healthy. Please do keep our neighbors near and in other countries in your prayers, and I hope we all look for ways to assist those in need of help while ill.

Know that you are in my prayers for a meaningful and healthy Lenten Season and Eastertide.

Grace and Peace,
Bishop Hughes

Additional resources:

World Health Organization: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Episcopal Relief & Development: Faith-based response to epidemics
<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics>