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Dear friends,

For a couple of weeks now the news media has been filled with articles about an outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), a newly identified virus which originates from a family of viruses that include the common cold, but also SARS and MERS. The situation changes daily and continues to evolve, but currently the total number of cases in Canada is very low; there is currently one known case of the virus in British Columbia and it is mild in nature. The World Health Organization (WHO) has NOT called a state of global emergency but continues to closely monitor and report on development.

It is important at this time to be aware of the situation as it develops, but not to become overly alarmed or panicked. Indeed, throughout history the church has been an agent of calm, reassurance, and compassion during times of uncertainty. We are called by Christ to tend to those who are sick, fearful, or anxious. As leaders, you have a responsibility in this.

Please be advised that the best source of information on the virus is NOT the local or international media, but rather the World Health Organization. Encourage your parishioners and staff to visit WHO's dedicated page where accurate, real-time updates can be found:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

At this time, no health authority is requesting that local churches change their practices or restrict its assemblies. However, it is appropriate that we remind ourselves of good general health guidelines. Given the health concerns among some of our parishioners, now is the time that we can take reasonable steps to reduce the possibility of communicating any disease when we come together as church. These general guidelines should already be part of our normal practices but please review the following guidelines:

1. Celebrants, communion administrators, liturgical ministers, and servers must, follow **proper hand washing and hand sanitizing techniques**. This means washing hands prior to the beginning of worship, and the use of hand sanitizers immediately before the Preparation of the Gifts. Hands should also be washed after the liturgy.
2. Any person distributing the sacrament from the common cup must be **trained in appropriate etiquette** and in the proper methods for wiping the vessel between communicants.
3. In particular, **fresh purificators** need to be used for each service and for each communion cup; purificators may need to be changed more frequently depending upon the size of the congregation. The purificator should be shaken out and repositioned so that a fresh spot is used each time it is used to wipe the common cup.

4. **Hand sanitizers should be available** at strategic locations and particularly at entrances of the church. Parishioners should be encouraged to use them before attending worship or other activities on church property.
5. Please encourage and remind your parishioners that if they are feeling ill, even mildly so, to **NOT** attend worship or church events. It's important to remind your community that children, elderly and those with compromised immune systems will be at high risk, including death, should this virus or influenza spread into our region.
6. **It is the policy of the bishop and Diocese of British Columbia that intinction is not an acceptable practice for public worship.** A combination of current literature and expert medical advice concludes that sipping from the common cup and sharing a handshake represent minimal risk of transmission of contagion and fall within the parameters of the normal risks of daily living. On the other hand, the practice of intinction is a higher risk activity; fingertips coming in contact with the bread which is then dipped in the wine or fingertips coming in direct contact with the wine may contaminate the shared wine with pathogens other than those found in saliva. The choice for a communicant, then, is to share the common cup or to receive in only one kind. I appreciate that for some of you this may be a change in practice, but it is based upon the very best information and research. If this prohibition means a change in the practices of your parish, please ensure that you take the time to clearly state the rationale and the alternatives. While the Reformation restored the common cup to the laity, Anglican sacramental theology has always held that the benefits of the sacrament do not require the reception in both kinds.
7. Personal touching will always be a matter of individual choice but banning the passing of the peace would be an over-reaction at this time. However, people's own needs should be respected, and **nodding or bowing are quite acceptable ways of sharing the Peace**, if so desired.


We are not yet at a stage where we need to go beyond these general health guidelines. In the event that there is a wide pandemic, we will issue guidelines for a highly infectious environment.

In the midst of all of this, I encourage all clergy to model basic principles of healthy living, including taking time to rest adequately. If you feel ill, tend to your personal health. Maintain best practices of hygiene while visiting sick parishioners through the use of hand sanitizers and hand washing. If your parish supports ministries of healing or visiting, ensure that volunteers are informed of necessary precautions. If need be, suspend especially high-risk ministries until circumstances permit them to resume.

Finally, but importantly, if you have a parish nurse, utilize their role as educator both within your parish and the larger community.

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours in Christ,



The Ven. Barry Foster
executive officer