



Update from Bishop Hirschfeld regarding COVID-19

March 10,, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

This is an update to the communication that was sent on February 27, 2020, concerning recommended precautions that our parishes should follow to prevent the spread of the coronavirus known as COVID-19.

Since that letter, it has become clear that our nation has moved to a new phase in addressing this highly transmissible virus. Above all, I am concerned for the health of our worshippers and to alleviate the increasing anxiety around the practice that is held dearest to us — the ongoing means of participating in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Holy Communion.

Out of an abundance of caution I have issued the following Pastoral Directive to clergy and lay pastoral leaders throughout the diocese on our behalf:

1. If any church member, including clergy, is feeling ill or shows any symptoms of fever, sneezing, coughing or difficulty breathing, please stay home until you contact your primary care physician. Please reach out to parishioners to let them know that if they cannot attend church, or are uncomfortable attending church, we can provide prayers, meals, and other supports.
2. Beginning immediately, only the consecrated bread of the Eucharist is to be distributed. A small amount of wine will be consecrated, but in solidarity with all who are vulnerable to COVID-19, we will all — clergy and laity alike — abstain from consuming the wine. Pour what is consecrated into a piscina or directly on the ground.
3. Offer each other the Peace with respectful acknowledgment but with no physical contact. Refrain from handshaking, hugging and other contact. Bowing to each other, friendly waves, and peace signs are all perfectly acceptable substitutes.
4. Any baptismal font that contains standing water is to be drained, thoroughly sanitized, and left empty.

In addition, I have also urged clergy to refrain from distributing homemade bread for communion, but to use packaged wafers. This practice will help those who distribute communion from handling the bread any more than is necessary during the sharing of the sacrament.

These new protocols, shared with many of our sibling churches throughout the Episcopal Church and other liturgical denominations are temporary and are to remain in place until this current health crisis has passed. Though they can be seen as a bothersome change, I believe these practices can also provide us a way to live in sacred solidarity with those who are now living with restrictions, even quarantine or hospitalization. We are in this together, in this life together, as part of a human family. I would also remind and reassure our worshippers that Communion by one element, by bread alone, allows us to receive the full spiritual benefits of our Lord's Passion and Resurrection.

Thank you for your attention to these time-limited pastoral changes in our liturgical practice in the Episcopal Church in New Hampshire. I am deeply grateful for the care and concern that you are showing to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, especially to the most vulnerable among us, the elderly and those with weakened immunities.

Please feel free to contact my office if you have any questions.

Faithfully Yours in the Great Physician, Jesus Christ,

The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld
Bishop