

Communion and the Coronavirus

Instructions for the People of the Diocese of Fond du Lac

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I have received questions regarding the growing concern about possible spread of the coronavirus. First of all, I want to remind us that God's love is greater than any disease or danger. So, we need not succumb to a spirit of fear. We will continue to gather for worship because that is what we do as Christians. Still, the assurance of faith does not mean that we do not exercise proper prudence and care for ourselves and one another. Seeking to be prudent in light of the potential spread of the coronavirus and more familiar flu viruses, I am directing members of the Diocese of Fond du Lac to adopt the following guidelines*.

Holy Communion

While it is our faith that the sacraments are means of grace and not of sickness, they are physically administered, and we should take physical care. As well as the specific concern about coronavirus, this advice is generally applicable to all infectious disease.

Wash Hands. Priests presiding at the Eucharist, Eucharistic Ministers, and servers must wash their hands with soap prior to serving and use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers immediately before the Preparation of the Table and Eucharistic prayer. I urge everyone to wash their hands with soap and warm water frequently in this season. The rule of thumb is to wash for about 20 seconds – or about as long as it takes to say the Lord's Prayer.

Do Not Intinct. Because hands can be as much or more of a source of pathogens as lips, intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) is actually less safe than drinking and can introduce germs into the cup. No matter how careful we are, fingers will inevitably be dipped in the wine with the bread. Some research actually suggests that illness is less likely to spread when drinking from a metal chalice. Keep fingers out of the cup.

Consider Receiving Holy Communion in One Kind. It is Anglican teaching that to receive the sacrament in one kind only (i.e. just the bread) is to receive the sacrament in its entirety. The celebrant should always receive from the chalice. Should a communicant feel ill or not wish to drink from the chalice then he or she ought to receive the consecrated bread alone. There is no need to cease offering the chalice to the congregation for those who desire to receive it.

The Peace. Passing the Peace as a symbol of our reconciliation and commitment to belong to one another as members of the body of Christ is an essential element of the liturgy. But it is not essential that we shake hands or embrace one another in doing so. Greeting others verbally, with a wave, a nod and a smile suffice. It might be prudent to avoid hand shaking and hugging until the threat of infection has ebbed. Use your discretion and respect the boundaries others set for themselves.

Visiting. Pastoral visitors to homes and hospitals should observe all precautions in personal hygiene before and after such visits.

If You Think You Might be Sick (with symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath) you should stay home and say Morning Prayer or otherwise join your prayers to those of your congregation from afar. And see a doctor ASAP.

Further direction might be given should the virus begin to spread more widely in the United States.

* (Adapted and expanded from those of the Diocese of London in the Church of England)