

**Responding to the Coronavirus:  
Expressing our Unity in Christ in our Church Communities  
and in the Holy Eucharist**



**Diocese of New Westminster**  
ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Information about the coronavirus was obtained from the Government of Canada Website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

The outbreak of the human coronavirus has all of us concerned. Here are some of the questions that have come up from some in our diocese about the coronavirus and our churches in the Diocese of New Westminster.

- How can we continue to nurture our sense of oneness with God and with each other in the face of worry about either catching or transmitting the coronavirus to others?
- What specifically is the best thing to do within the celebration of the Eucharist to minimize the risk of someone becoming infected with the virus?
- What can we do to raise our own and others' awareness of our fears related to the geographic area where the virus emerged? How can we take some actions to prevent those fears from turning into prejudices related to a particular racial and cultural group?

The following are some ways to address our own and others' fears and remain faithful in our eucharistic life together as a community.

1. **Educate ourselves and others about the nature of the virus** (most of below is directly from of a summary of information from the Government of Canada website).

Human coronaviruses cause infections of the nose, throat and lungs. They are most commonly spread from an infected person through the air (by coughing and sneezing), through close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands or by touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands.

There are currently no vaccines available to protect you against human coronavirus infection. You may be able to reduce your risk of infection or spreading infection to others by doing the following: staying home if you are sick, when coughing or sneezing: covering your mouth and nose with your arm to reduce the spread of germs, dis-

posing of any tissues you have used as soon as possible and wash your hands afterwards, washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

As of this communique (February 6, 2020) there are four *confirmed* cases in Canada, one of which is in the Vancouver area. Thus, as of this date, the risk level in British Columbia and in the Vancouver area is low.

2. **Engage in overall practices that can help prevent the transmission of disease in a parish. *These are best practices for all of us at all times.*** Hand sanitizers, while not a complete means of avoiding viral or other kinds of infection, should be placed in strategic locations throughout the church. Encourage and remind parishioners who may feel ill, even mildly so, not to attend worship. Remaining at home protects the most vulnerable: children, the elderly, those with compromised immune systems and those who suffer chronic respiratory conditions. Arrange home communion visits for those who wish to receive the sacrament.
3. **Undertake specific Eucharistic practices that help to minimize the chance of spreading the coronavirus or any other bacterial or viral infection. *Again, these are best practices for all of us at all times.***
  - a. **Presiders, communion administrants and other liturgical ministers should follow proper hand washing and hand sanitizing techniques.** All those involved in the leadership of worship must wash their hands with warm, soapy water prior at the beginning of the liturgy and, as an extra precaution, use hand sanitizer before the preparation of the table. After sanitizing their hands, all those administering communion should avoid touching their nose, mouths, or eyes. After the liturgy all should wash their hands again with warm, soapy water.
  - b. **Anyone who administers the chalice must follow these steps:** 1) Clean purificators are to be used for each service. It may be necessary to have additional purificators available during the course of communion. 2) The chalice is to be wiped with real friction on both the inside and outside of the rim of the chalice between each communicant and then turned so that the next communicant receives from a fresh location. 3) Chalices and patens are to be cleaned properly with hot water (preferably scalding water) and soap. 4) Purificators should be used only once and cleaned in hot water. Studies have shown that the risk of infection from the common cup is negligible when a metal chalice is used with wine and the administrator follows the steps above. The metal chalice does not readily provide a place for germs/viruses to adhere, and the alcohol in wine discourages the presence or growth of bacteria or viruses.
  - c. **Intinction should not be allowed (under any circumstances) in that the potential of fingers making contact with the wine poses a significant**

**risk in the spreading of a virus or other infection from one person to another.** While some in our parishes are in the habit of intincting (holding a wafer in one's hand and dipping it into the chalice), the practice runs the risk of transferring germs from one person to another through the wine. Also, in parishes that provide a gluten-free bread alternative to wafers, intinction can contaminate the wine and cause potential health risks to gluten-intolerant communicants. Parishes will need to be educated about this, explaining the importance and the lower risk of drinking from the common cup OR explaining that, should a person not want to receive the cup, they are encouraged to receive the bread alone (which the Church understands as being a full participation in the gift Christ offers us in the Eucharist).

- d. **Exchanging the Peace can be done in a variety of ways:** When we exchange the peace, we should always respect the needs and attitudes of others. Bowing or nodding to another person is an appropriate expression of our commitment to communal life. It is also appropriate to place one's own hands palm to palm as one bows to another person as a sign of peace.
4. **Engage in a specific temporary practice at the Eucharist, should the concern about coronavirus become acute in Canada or in our region of Canada (that is, should the coronavirus become a real and significant health hazard in our region).** Under these circumstances, churches should consider temporarily going to distributing communion in one kind only (bread only) via the placement of a wafer or a piece of bread from Presider's/Priest's/Deacon's/Administrant's hand into the palm of the person receiving the bread. In that the Common Cup is an ancient symbol of unity, we do not allow distributing wine in small, individual cups as a solution to the issue we may be facing. Rather, we believe, as the ancient Church believed, that receiving "in one kind" is full participation in the gift Christ offers us in the Eucharist.
5. **Name the fears and prejudices that may come up for us and for others and consciously turn away from those prejudices and fears.** Given the information we have about where the human Corona virus originated, it would be easy to begin, consciously or unconsciously, focusing that fear on a specific racial or cultural group. At any given time in human history viruses have arisen in one part of the world and over time been transmitted to other regions. The ease of international travel in contemporary society has made such transmission even easier.

While it is vital that we take precautions to prevent the spread of biological viruses, it is equally vital that we take proactive steps to prevent the spread of another kind of "virus"—the virus of ethnic or national blame. As a Diocese we are committed to dismantling racism. The current outbreak of the corona virus provides us with the responsibility to dismantle any prejudice or racism that can emerge during such a time.