



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

TO THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

TO BE READ AT ALL SERVICES ON SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020

Dear friends:

In recent weeks, we have been closely monitoring the outbreak of the coronavirus, COVID-19, as I know you have been as well. I would ask your prayers for all who are ill with this virus, for their caregivers, and for healthcare workers and researchers working to limit the virus' impact.

As I write this letter, the Public Health Agency of Canada continues to assess the public health risk associated with this virus as low for Canada. Still, as a faith community we must be diligent in our hygiene practices for the wellbeing of all in our congregations, particularly those who are vulnerable.

To reduce exposure to and transmission of a range of illnesses, including coronaviruses, Ontario's Ministry of Health reminds us to follow usual health precautions which include washing our hands often, avoiding contact with people who are sick, and practicing proper cough and sneeze etiquette.

It's also essential that we practice sound liturgical hygiene practices, not just at times like these but for the general wellbeing of our congregations:

- Parishes should make hand sanitizer available throughout the church for parishioners to use.
- Clergy and communion assistants should wash their hands both before and after worship as well as sanitize their hands before administering communion.
- Clergy and pastoral care workers should take all precautions in personal hygiene before and after pastoral visits in hospital and homes.
- Parishioners who are ill, or suspect they may be, should be encouraged to stay at home to recover and to request a pastoral visit if desired.

In addition, out of an abundance of caution, we are asking congregations to adopt a contact-free Exchange of the Peace, with a smile, brief word, or slight bow instead to those nearby. As well, clergy are advised to greet parishioners at the end of services without physical contact. The available evidence suggests that sipping from the common cup represents minimal risk, and one that falls within the parameters of the normal risks of daily living. Intinction (dipping consecrated bread into in a chalice of consecrated wine) is, however, a higher-risk activity and a practice that is prohibited in our diocese.

Together, these efforts will help ensure the wellbeing of our communities and those we serve.

Please know that my prayers are with you during this anxious time and that we will continue be in contact with public health experts in order to provide our parishes with evidence-based pastoral advice.

Sincerely,

The Bishop of Niagara

The Right Reverend Susan J. A. Bell
Cathedral Place, 252 James St. N., Hamilton, Ontario L8R 2L3 Tel: 905-527-1316
Email: bishop@niagaraanglican.ca Twitter: @BishopSBell