



THE REFORMED EPISCOPAL CHURCH
OFFICE FOR THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
A Founding Member of the Province of the
ANGLICAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

March 11, 2020

Dear Bishops, Clergy, Wardens, Vestries and All Laity,

“Do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30)

“Fear not” is the most repeated command in the Bible; 365 times! Jesus Christ told His disciples on many occasions, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30; Matthew 28:5, 10). The only One whom we are to fear is God Himself. And even when the Bible uses the word fear in reference to God, it means “respect.” The Lord simply doesn’t want His people to be overcome with, and to act out of fear. When we are driven by fear, we stop trusting the Lord. We usually don’t make our best decisions.

Nevertheless, we must face into our fears when they arise, with faith in God, sound wisdom, and responsible action. For these reasons I am writing to you as the news coverage on the global COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak has raised many fears, concerns, and questions. Archbishop Foley Beach has written an excellent communication to all the Bishops of the ACNA (See REC website). He has encouraged all our bishops to write to their dioceses and congregations. I believe this is godly, timely and important direction.

We have faced flu epidemics before. Influenza still takes thousands of lives each year. Hopefully, we can get ahead of the curve with the COVID-19. So, I offer the following counsel, as you consider how to respond with extra prayer and precaution in caring for those in need, in meeting together, in worshipping, and especially in administering Holy Communion.

First, please pray for those afflicted around the world, for God to guide government and medical leaders in caring for the sick, and for the speedy development of new vaccines.

Second, please be informed. I recommend periodically checking the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/>.

Third, please be prepared since we are a sacramental church where most of our congregations regularly receive Holy Communion. Even though scientific studies have confirmed there is very little risk of transmitting a disease through the Common cup (using wine), the current situation with COVID-19 calls for extra care and precaution in administering and receiving Holy Communion. I therefore strongly suggest the following for your prayerful consideration, while not mandating the way of receiving the Sacrament:

- a) Regarding the actual administration of the Eucharist, clergy and lay readers/chalice bearers should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer. They should also

use hand sanitizer right before they begin distributing the Communion elements. Purificators may be dipped or soaked in strong alcohol as well before being used to wipe the chalice.

- b) As for reception of the Blessed Sacrament, I encourage our clergy and congregations to consider alternate methods of receiving Holy Communion until we're past the COVID-19 crisis. The decision is left to each parish to work out how the Lord is leading at this time. I offer the following summary and suggestions for your prayerful discernment.
- c) Most of us receive in both kinds (Bread and Wine) directly from a paten/ciborium or chalice.
- d) Some of us use another method known as intinction. With reception by intinction one does not actually drink from the chalice. The host is dipped by the minister/chalice bearer or the recipient into the chalice and administered/received. However, for your information intinction as it's normally practiced has even greater potential of spreading germs. The two most common ways of intinction are the following: 1) the recipient receives the host, holds it until the chalice passes by, and dips it in the chalice; 2) the recipient holds the host until the chalice bearer takes it, dips it in the chalice; and then places the wafer in the hand or mouth of the recipient. There is a third way: 3) the minister and chalice bearer walk side by side to distribute, as the host is dipped in the chalice by the clergyman and placed on the hand or in the mouth of the recipient. If a parish wants to administer by intinction, I strongly recommend the third way. The first two methods allow for multiple contact between the recipient's hand/fingers and the chalice, and actually contribute more to the spread of germs. The third method greatly reduces such contact, as only the minister is actually dipping the host into the chalice before distributing. Of course, this approach would probably require moving to this practice exclusively.
- e) Some of our congregations make available the individual cups. It is often thought that this method better prevents the spread of germs. It actually does not. Germs are spread more through the hands. Administration by individual cups involves contact with the hands of those who prepare the communion, those administering, those receiving, and those cleaning up the cups afterwards. If a parish wants to continue to make available the individual cups, please consider how contact by multiple hands touching the cups can be minimized and better sanitized.
- f) Having mentioned the above approaches of receiving Holy Communion, no doubt the safest way at times of heightened spread of infectious disease is to receive only the host (The Bread). There is an old understanding in the Church, "To receive in one kind is to receive in both kinds." That is, theologically speaking we are given to understand the Sacrament of Holy Communion remains a means of grace if received only in one kind. Either element alone conveys what Christ says of the Lord's Supper, when He says, "This is My Body; This is My Blood." Clearly the preferred pattern is to receive in both kinds, but the fact is that throughout the history of Christianity some believers have only been able to receive in one kind for physical, personal or medical reasons. Therefore, please know that you have my strong support and permission should Reformed Episcopalians and their congregations choose to receive only the host, until we get past this time of concern over the Corona Virus.

Fourth, as for our time in worship and fellowship together I encourage any members with symptoms of a cough, disease or a fever within the last 24 hours to stay at home. Provide several containers of alcohol based (60%-95%) hand sanitizer around your congregation in highly visible and accessible areas (vestibule/narthex etc.). Make sure there is a container available for members to use before taking Holy Communion. Provide boxes of Kleenex and facial tissue in the sanctuary so that those members who are coughing and sneezing can safely cover their mouths and nose.

Fifth, with reference to pastoral visitations, the clergy should follow all infection control measures in place at hospitals. If it is not possible to visit someone with the COVID-19 Virus, call and pray with folks on the phone. It's possible to stay in contact and convey Christ's love and support.

Sixth, it is important if at all possible, for all of us as Christians to continue to go to church, to worship, to receive Holy Communion, to pray, and to continue our life together. At the same time, I realize that civil and local authorities may have to put their communities in lock down prohibiting worship and church attendance for limited periods. As Christians we should honor these decisions from those in authority over us. Remember though, these times will pass. We should return to our churches for worship after restrictions are lifted. Until such times would be imposed by the civil authorities, however, it is important for the people of God to continue worship and prayer especially at this time. God is the Great Healer. The world needs His healing more than ever! He can and will heal the nations of the world as they turn to Jesus Christ. Let's remember what an important moment the coming months will be for the spread of the Gospel.

In conclusion, we will monitor developments and pass on to you some helpful resources and information as they are needed and become available. Pastorally though, I pray that you not allow this new virus to make you live in fear. Still, however, we are called to use sound judgment. To this end, I have attempted to share some thoughts that, hopefully, will help all of us. I pray for God's guidance for you and His continued blessing upon our congregations. I commend the following prayer from the Book of Common Prayer for use in your worship services:

O Most mighty and merciful God, in this time of grievous sickness, we flee unto thee for succor. Deliver us, we beseech thee, from our peril; give strength and skill to all those who minister to the sick; prosper the means made use of for their cure; and grant that, perceiving how frail and uncertain our life is, we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which leadeth to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Ray R. Sutton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Rev. Dr. Ray R. Sutton, Ph.D.
Presiding Bishop