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TO: The Clergy and Parishes of the Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

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Pastoral Letter with regards to COVID 19

Yesterday the Coronavirus COVID 19 was declared to be a pandemic according to the World Health Organization. In practical terms this declaration doesn't mean much. The disease is already having a profound effect around the world. As of this morning, there are no known cases in Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island, and there is very limited community transmission anywhere in Canada. We cannot be complacent about this situation. It is almost certain that there will be transmission of this disease within our diocese. We will continue to monitor developments closely and provide relevant advice and direction to parishes. Public Health Authorities have begun to focus on "Social Distancing" as a means to slow the spread of the virus. With this in mind:

General Health Care Directions

- We need to continue to emphasize the practices that individuals need to take to decrease the likelihood of viral or bacterial infection.
- Wash hands, Wash Hands, Wash Hands is the refrain from Public Health – Do it, promote it. Use soap and hot water, wash regularly and thoroughly for 20 - 30 seconds.
- If it is not possible to use soap and water, use 60% alcohol based hand sanitizer. Place Hand sanitizer in strategic places in church buildings.
- Cough or sneeze into your arm rather than hand. If you cough or sneeze into a tissue, dispose of it immediately.
- Don't touch your face.
- Stay home from work, school or any activities if you are ill.
- Strengthen and increase the frequency of the sanitization of spaces and surfaces: Where possible, we need to use antiseptic cleaners (a bleach solution or other effective antiseptic cleaners) for surfaces that people in our parishes touch (e.g., tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, sinks). We also need to increase the frequency of cleaning our spaces and surfaces. Clean high touch surfaces often.

Liturgical Considerations

- While there is no evidence that the Common Cup is a threat to health, as concerns about touching any surfaces become greater, I now ask you to withdraw the Common Cup entirely for a period of time. What this would mean is that the celebrant would consecrate a cup of wine and would leave it on the altar during the administration of the bread, after which time, the celebrant would consume the wine. Communion will be offered in one kind only to all communicants i.e. the consecrated bread/wafer/host, with the priest alone taking the wine. While there is no medical evidence to connect drinking from the chalice to getting the flu, at this time it seems prudent to suspend our usual practice. Anglican sacramental theology has taught that the fullness of the sacrament is present in each element; therefore receiving the consecrated bread is receiving Communion.
- Intinction is not to be allowed -under any circumstances.

- Suspend handshaking or other direct physical contact during the sharing of the peace. 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. There are a variety of ways to share peace without physical contact.
- Suspend direct physical contact as part of a blessing or 'laying on of hands'.
- Drain the font and any Holy Water stoups: We need to drain the water from all fonts and Holy Water stoups, and suspend the practice of dipping the hands or fingers in the water of both. If we are doing baptisms new water needs to be used for each person.
- Suspend passing the offering plate. Please do not pass offering plates or baskets from hand to hand. Instead of people touching plates or baskets, put the plate or the basket in one spot and ask people to come to the plate to put in their offerings.

Social gatherings

- Given that there are no public health directives to stop gathering, I don't see the need to restrict gathering for worship at this time. Nor do I see a reason to cancel classes, meetings and small gatherings in parishes on Sunday and during the week.
- We need to be aware that the population most at risk of serious outcomes in contracting COVID 19 are the people who make up most of our congregations.
- The holding of large group gatherings where people will be in close contact for prolonged periods of time should be evaluated. These might include concerts or public meals. Err on the side of caution.
- Where food is being served all surfaces should be sanitized before and after food service. Proper Food Handling protocol should be followed (as always).
- Parish leaders, lay and ordained, need to plan how at the parish level people will stay connected to each other in the event that the parish must suspend worship and other gatherings for a time. Parish leaders will also need to work through what the implications might be for shutting down the church building entirely to any operations (e.g., rentals, to include other churches that meet in our spaces, day care centres, etc.).
- Avenues to maintain communication and some sense of gathered worship in the event that we are directed not to gather physically:
 - Parish Facebook groups and posting updates as well as posting video sermons there.
 - Collecting/strengthening email and phone contact lists (with people's permission) so that e-list updates and messages can go out periodically so that a group of leaders and/or communication people can call on others to see how they are doing.
 - The use of the parish website to keep people updated and informed and as a place to post sermons (text or video).
 - Using ZOOM (if you are signed up) to offer Morning Prayer on a regular basis.
 - Providing links or materials for people to do Morning or Evening Prayer on their own.
 - The use of YouTube for worship/sermons etc.

Clearly, none of us knows precisely how the current situation will develop so we need to pray and work to be prepared for all reasonable eventualities.

Prayers from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Occasional Services for the Assembly* (2009).

National distress

Eternal God, amid all the turmoil and changes of the world your love is steadfast and your strength never fails. In this time of danger and trouble, be to us a sure guardian and rock of defence. Guide the leaders of our nation with your wisdom, comfort those in distress, and grant us courage and hope to face the future; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen. [OSA, p. 393]

Confinement (Quarantine)

Merciful God, in the stillness of our souls we listen for your voice to know again that you are God. Quiet our restless hearts with the knowledge that you are near us, keeping watch over your own. Rekindle our faith and light the lamp of hope within our hearts. Then take us by the hand into each day that lies ahead, for where you lead we can confidently go with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [OSA, p. 291]

Caregivers and others who support the sick

Compassionate God, support and strengthen all those who reach out in love, concern and prayer for the sick and distressed. In their acts of compassion, may they know that they are your instruments. In their concerns and fears, may they know your peace. In their faithful serving, may they know your steadfast love. May they not grow weary or faint-hearted, for your mercy's sake. Amen. [OSA, p. 297]

In a time of heightened anxiety, I am deeply grateful for your faithfulness. Please keep our parishes, people, and me in your prayers.

In Christ,



The Most Reverend Ron Cutler
Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island
Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada