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Letter to Clergy: Coronavirus Update #1

March 6, 2020

Dear Clergy Colleagues in Christ:

On Friday, February 28th we wrote to you concerning initial precautions you and your parish should take to avoid the spread of the coronavirus known as COVID-19. That letter can be accessed at: <https://www.episcopalct.org/news/precautions-regarding-the-coronavirus/> We urge you to continue to pay attention to the directives in our last letter. We write now with an update to these directives, especially as it relates to our liturgical practices.

It is now clear that cases of COVID-19 have been documented on our state's borders in both Rhode Island and New York. We believe it is only a matter of time before the coronavirus arrives in Connecticut. We should be vigilant and take immediate steps both to mitigate the spread of coronavirus and protect our communities before COVID-19 becomes widespread in Connecticut. We note here that elderly individuals are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, and since many of our parishioners share this demographic we must be hypervigilant in helping to keep our parishes safe and healthy.

It is well documented that COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person through the spread of respiratory droplets originating from an affected person's mouth or nose. See the Center for Disease Control information on "How COVID-19 Spreads" at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html> Significant precautions thus need to be taken to limit the spread of respiratory droplets. This has a direct bearing on our liturgical practices, especially the sharing of the common cup.

The Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer note that: "Opportunity is always to be given to every communicate to receive the consecrated Bread and Wine separately." (BCP p. 407) At the same time the Canons of the Episcopal Church state: "The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the bishop." Canon III.9.6(a)(1) As your bishops we believe that the following liturgical pastoral direction is in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and is in keeping with both the Rubrics and Canons of The Episcopal Church.

Beginning immediately, only the consecrated bread of the Eucharist is to be distributed at the altar rail and/or regular place of communion in your parish. Provision for those who wish to take the risk of drinking from a common cup should be made by having only one station for communicating the wine, separate

from the altar rail and/or regular place of communion in your parish. In no cases should intinction (the act of dipping the bread into the wine) be used to receive the wine.

As the clergy in charge of the liturgy, please note for your parishioners that this liturgical pastoral directive is intended to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and also to protect those who are worshipping. It will be time limited direction based on the progress of the disease. Please also re-emphasize from our letter last week that receiving only the bread at the time of communion is a full and sufficient participation in the sacrament.

In addition to these liturgical changes in the distribution of communion, we ask that you empty all fonts and other receptacles of holy water in your parish as respiratory droplets carrying COVID-19 may also be transmitted through hands being dipped in the water.

Thank you for your attention to these time-limited pastoral changes in our liturgical practice in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. We, your bishops, so appreciate the care and concern that you are showing to help mitigate against the spread of COVID-19. We will write regularly with updates regarding how we can care for those who will be infected by the coronavirus and also how we can best keep our communities as safe as possible. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

You are very much in our prayers in this challenging time.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan

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