



St. Mary's Episcopal Church

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Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent
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Out of an Abundance of Compassion: A Pastoral Letter Regarding the COVID-19 Coronavirus

“Do not fear.” - God’s repeated message throughout the Old & New Testaments

“Pray without ceasing.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” - John Wesley

Dear St. Mary’s Parish Family,

Lent is a season of preparation to observe again Jesus’ passion, death, burial, and resurrection. Many of us find particular practices to be helpful in drawing closer to God during this season. Given that the viral spread of flu and the COVID-19 coronavirus is a reality which we now face along with our neighbors around the world, let us consider anew our Lenten disciplines, and engage in practices that can help mitigate such spreading and protect the most vulnerable of our neighbors.

First, let us consider it a spiritual discipline to resist fear of all kinds and be in prayer for the whole human family, especially for those with weakened immune systems, the aged, infants, the infirmed, and medical professionals who seek to care for them. Let our prayers shape our actions and lead us in compassionate response, resisting seemingly self-preserving actions that might make life more difficult or even dangerous for others.

Second, let us consider it a spiritual discipline to avail ourselves of reliable information as best as possible. Unfortunately there are people who will attempt to take advantage of others in times like this, so be diligent in checking your sources of information and careful in responding to requests for funds from unknown entities. The following link of our diocese will point you towards knowledge-base resources offered by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and Episcopal Relief & Development:

<https://www.ecdio.org/coronavirus-prevention-preparedness.html>

Third, let us consider it a spiritual discipline to be willing to adapt our own practices of worship and shared life together in consideration of the welfare of others. It is out of an abundance of compassion, and in careful consideration of the guidance from our bishop, the WHO, the CDC, UNC-Lenoir Health Care, and many clergy colleagues that I am making the following requests and decisions for the St. Mary’s community:

- Worshippers at St. Mary’s are asked to wash their hands with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds (about the time it takes to pray the Lord’s Prayer) before leaving home.

- If you are feeling ill, and especially if you are experiencing the currently known clinical symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, or shortness of breath), stay at home. Take advantage of the *Book of Common Prayer* Daily Office liturgies (pgs. 36-144 contain multiple options for prayer throughout the day; see also www.bcponline.org)
- Those scheduled to serve at our liturgies should not join the altar party if they have had any signs of the flu or COVID-19 within 24 hours. Please carry out the normally-requested methods of arranging a substitute.
- Church & Nursery School staff members, as well as worshippers, are asked to refrain from shaking hands or hugging. Please consider other means of greetings, especially while passing the Peace (i.e. a wave, a bow, or nod, etc).
- Clergy, Eucharistic Ministers, Altar Guild members, and Ushers commit to washing hands for at least 20 seconds before vesting and otherwise preparing for ministry.
- The Crucifer will give hand sanitizer to the clergy and Eucharistic Ministers before communion is distributed.
- Communion will be distributed from a standing station at the bottom of the chancel steps so as to avoid use of the altar rail, which is touched by most hands of worshippers.
- Please read the footnotes in this paragraph. All communicants are encouraged to receive communion in one kind (bread only).¹ Until further notice, receiving communion by intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) will not be offered.² However, for those who wish to drink from the common cup, rest assured that the communion wine will always be offered, per the requirement of the *Book of Common Prayer* (pg. 407).

I assure you that these temporary adaptations will be a challenge to me, as I suspect they may be for you. Yet, I also believe that in being willing to continue to regularly meet in Christ's name while humbly adopting these practices as a sign of compassion for others, St. Mary's will be offering another example that the church is truly a beacon of light to a darkened world. May we always be faithful in responding to our Lord's invitation to lives marked by resistance to fear, prayer, wisdom, and compassion.

Yours in Christ Jesus,



The Reverend Thomas P. H. Warren
Rector, St. Mary's Episcopal Church

¹ The church has taught since the 6th century that Christ's presence cannot be divided. Eucharistic theology follows that all of the grace of communion is conferred wholly in each element (bread and wine). To receive only the bread is not to receive "half communion." Instead, receiving in one kind is to receive the full mystical benefit of the Eucharistic feast.

² The following are excerpts of articles that led, in part, to the decision about intinction and support the practice of a common cup. I am glad to share the full articles with anyone who requests them.

Peer-Reviewed Article, "The hazard of infection from the shared communion cup" *Journal of Infection* (1988) (Vol. 16, pgs. 3-23).

Key quote: "No episode of disease attributable to the shared communion cup has ever been reported. Currently available data do not provide any support for suggesting that the practice of sharing a common communion cup should be abandoned because it might spread infection."

Letter to the Editor from CDC Scientists, "Risk of Infectious Disease Transmission from a Common Communion Cup" *American Journal of Infection Control* (1998) (Vol. 26, No. 5, pgs. 538-539).

Key quotes: "no documented transmission of any infectious disease has ever been traced to the use of a common communion cup" and "the risk for infectious disease transmission by a common communion cup is very low, and appropriate safeguards--that is, wiping the interior and exterior rim between communicants, use of care to rotate the cloth during use, and use of a clean cloth for each service - would further diminish this risk."

Note: The Altar Guild and Eucharistic Ministers of St. Mary's have engaged in these best practices for years.