March 4, 2020

Dear clergy and lay colleagues,

As a follow-up to Canon Brad Purdom’s email of last week, I write to offer an additional word of caution and direction about the safety of those in our congregations and communities in this time of heightened concern about the Coronavirus.

While COVID-19 has yet to be manifested in our diocese, public health officials are clear that its spread is inevitable. Information about how the virus is transferred is changing on an almost daily basis. It is important to take sensible precautions and make reasonable adjustments to pastoral and liturgical practices, as you and your congregation deem appropriate.

After conversation with bishops in dioceses where COVID-19 has been spreading, I suggest that you and your communicants should consider:

- suspending the practice of intinction, both in the common cup and intinction cups;
- refraining from drinking from the common cup when experiencing any symptoms of cold or flu, or if you have any suppression of your immune system (the Doctrine of Concomitance assures us that the sacrament is efficacious in one kind) - dioceses where the virus is spreading broadly are considering consecration of bread and wine at the Eucharist but suspending distribution of the cup temporarily and distributing only the host;
- not placing the host on the tongue of communicants, but only in the hands;
- exchanging God’s peace without making physical contact (perhaps by holding one another’s gaze for a moment rather than bumping elbows or other actions that might reduce the seriousness and solemnity of the exchange);
- emptying fonts and other vessels of holy water used when blessing or crossing oneself;
- making hand sanitizer available to all, in obvious places;
- restricting Eucharistic visiting to priests for the time being, and being particularly careful when visiting those whose immune defenses are compromised or who reside in communities where that is common.

It is important to recognize that, for some, the physical contact experienced at church and in parish ministries may constitute the majority of personal contact they receive during the week. Refraining from embracing and other intimate contact may be a genuine loss for them. Consider other safe and appropriate means to respond to this pastoral need.

With fear of pandemic often comes a vulnerability to associate its source with people of particular geographical and cultural backgrounds. This has been tragically so with other previous contagious illnesses. Please remember that, in God’s loving community, the response to illness is to draw together with compassion and care, not to be separated from one another.

As we learn more about this illness, its mode of contagion, and how to protect one another most effectively, we will keep you informed.

I join you in keeping all those affected by this illness, and those ministering to them, in our prayers.

Gratefully,

The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop of Ohio