

A Message from Bishop Rick Jaech

How do we care for each other as we are mindful of the coronavirus?

It is wise and appropriate to be concerned about the spreading of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and to take reasonable precautions as we gather at our churches for worship and meetings. The healing ministry that Jesus modeled for us certainly includes basic care for one another as well as care for ourselves. I offer to you below a summary of good recommendations that come from public health spokespeople and religious leaders.

First, what should we do each day wherever we are – at church, at home, and at work.

1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. All the time. All day long.
2. At all times, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth – the places germs enter the body.
3. When you cough, cough into your bent elbow, not into your hand. If you have to blow your nose, dispose of the tissue as soon as possible in a waste container with a lid that closes and then either wash your hands immediately or use an alcohol-based liquid (at least 60% alcohol) to sanitize your hands.
4. Keep a respectful distance from people when you are talking to them. We don't have to be in each other's faces to talk. This is particularly important if someone is coughing or sneezing.
5. Whenever possible, use Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Skype for meetings.
6. If you're sick, stay home! Encourage others to stay home if they are sick.

Should we attend worship services at church? Yes, as long as you are not sneezing, coughing, or running a fever, in which case you should stay and home and take care of yourself, contacting your doctor if symptoms persist. Gathering for worship, singing, receiving the Eucharist, and being with friends all supports your wellness. However, when you are at church, you should follow these practices that reduce the spread of germs and help people to feel safer.

1. Have a discussion as a congregation about different ways to Share the Peace. For example, instead of shaking hands you can:
 - Tap elbows or forearms with each other as you Share the Peace.

- Place your hands at your heart in a prayer position or cross your hands over your heart and bow towards one another. (This has been the practice for some time at Lutheran churches in Asia)
- Wave to the other person as you say, “God’s peace be with you.”
- Once again, open discussion and idea-sharing about this would be useful. Otherwise, some people will worry that they will seem “unfriendly” if they don’t shake hands, while others will stop coming to church.

2. Everyone distributing bread and wine at Holy Communion should use alcohol-based liquid hand sanitizer just prior to distribution (at least 60% alcohol to be effective). Bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer can also be placed on little tables at the head of the aisle as people come forward. People are then able to sanitize their own hands before they receive the bread.

3. Regarding receiving the wine:

- Intinction is the least healthy way to receive the wine, since some people will inadvertently touch the wine with their fingers as they dip the bread. Fingers carry far more germs than our lips do. If intinction is used, it is safer for the communicant to give the piece of bread to the person serving the wine, who then dips the bread into the wine for them in a consistently safe way without touching the wine with their fingers and then places the bread in the communicant’s mouth without touching their tongue.
- Scientific tests have shown that drinking from the common cup does not spread germs, providing the cup has a silver finish. The interaction of the alcohol in the wine and the silver of the cup actively kills germs. Ceramic or non-silver cups do not protect against germs. After each person drinks from the cup, servers need to wipe the rim of the cup inside and out with the purificator and rotate the cup before the next person drinks.
- If individual glasses are used, the altar guild must diligently wash their hands as they prepare all of the communion ware and particularly before filling the individual glasses.
- This may be a good occasion to remind people of a core principle of our Lutheran Eucharistic theology, namely that Christ is fully present and grace is fully received even when receiving just one of the two elements. Therefore, a person may choose to receive only the bread on a particular occasion. A respectful gesture is then to bow to the common cup when it is offered without drinking.

How do we care for each other during the week?

During this time of heightened health awareness, it would be good to recruit congregation members who can check in by phone with other members who may be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, or any other seasonal illness. The love of God becomes incarnate in a congregation that actively cares for each other, especially in a time of greater anxiety and risk.

In concluding, I leave you with these **two resources**.

Emmy Yang, a Christian woman from Wuhan, China, who is a Graduate Fellow at Duke Divinity School and also a medical student at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York, wrote a very helpful article in the current Christianity Today entitled, *Is It Faithful to Flee an Epidemic? What Martin Luther Teaches Us About Coronavirus*.

Her article summarizes Luther's teaching during an outbreak of the Plague in Wittenberg about whether Christians should care for one another in times of risk. Here is the link to that article. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/martin-luther-coronavirus-wuhan-chinese-new-year-christians.html>

Finally, I offer this prayer written by The Rt. Rev. Diane Jardine Bruce, Episcopal Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of Los Angeles, to which I added the last petition.

Holy and gracious God, give us the strength to meet the health crisis looming around us. Enlighten researchers that they may discover the right vaccine against this disease. Guide the doctors, nurses and all medical technicians working with those who are infected to take correct actions for their care. Protect all medical staff and family or friends caring for those who are ill. Bring together the governments and governmental agencies around the world to work together to eradicate this health threat. Guide our congregation as we care for one another and ourselves. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Rick Jaech