



## ANGLICAN DIOCESE MONTREAL

The Venerable Robert Camara  
Executive Archdeacon & Vicar General

February 28, 2020

Dear colleagues and lay leaders of the Diocese of Montreal,

Last night you will have heard that Quebec has had its first presumptive case of the Covid-19 virus (corona virus) here in the Montreal-area. Health officials had warned that the virus' spread to Quebec was inevitable, but that its overall risk to the population was low. We all have memories of the SARS (2003) and MERS (2012) outbreaks which necessitated a concerted plan of action to prevent the spread of the viruses.

On January 27, 2020, our Primate issued a statement with an outline of what precautions, we as communities of faith, should be taking to aid in that fight against the spread of Covid-19. On January 29, 2020, Bishop Mary wrote to the clergy of the Diocese to ask them to share the Primate's statement and to remind us of the precautions taken during SARS, here in our own diocese, that are highlighted in the clergy handbook. I write to you today to build on what has already been stated and to encourage the clergy and lay leaders of our parishes and communities to exercise appropriate cautions during this crucial time in the spread of this strain of the coronavirus.

As our Primate and Bishop have already stated, it is important that we continue to uphold in prayer all those who are ill with this virus and those who are caring for them, especially those at the epicentre of this outbreak in China, but also those places like Italy and Iran who have seen a dramatic and significant outbreak of the virus.

Within your own parishes and communities please keep these guidelines in mind:

1. Celebrants, communion administrators, liturgical ministers, and servers must, follow proper hand washing and hand sanitizing techniques. This means washing hands prior to the beginning of worship, and the use of hand sanitizers immediately before the Preparation of the Gifts. Hands should also be washed after the liturgy.
2. Any person distributing the sacrament from the common cup must be trained in appropriate etiquette and in the proper methods for wiping the vessel between communicants. In particular, fresh purificators need to be used for each service and for each communion cup; purificators may need to be changed more frequently depending upon the size of the congregation. The purificator should be shaken out and repositioned so that a fresh spot is used each time it is used to wipe the common cup.
3. Scent-free hand sanitizers should be available at strategic locations and particularly at entrances of the church. Note: the higher the alcohol content the better. Parishioners should be encouraged to use them before attending worship or other activities on church property.

4. Please encourage and remind your parishioners to let their consideration for others guide their decisions: If you have a fever, stay home and do not attend worship or church events. If you have a cold, don't shake hands at the peace and always wash your hands thoroughly, often and regularly – this is important even during the regular winter season run of the common cold and flu! It's important to remind your community that children, elderly and those with compromised immune systems will be at high risk.
5. It is the policy of the bishop that intinction is not an acceptable practice for public worship. A combination of current literature and expert medical advice concludes that sipping from the common cup and sharing a handshake represent minimal risk of transmission of contagion and fall within the parameters of the normal risks of daily living. On the other hand, the practice of intinction is a higher risk activity; fingertips coming in contact with the bread which is then dipped in the wine or fingertips coming in direct contact with the wine may contaminate the shared wine with pathogens other than those found in saliva. The choice for a communicant, then, is to share the common cup or to receive in only one kind. I appreciate that for some of you this may be a change in practice, but it is based upon the very best information and research. If this prohibition means a change in the practices of your parish, please ensure that you take the time to clearly state the rationale and the alternatives. While the Reformation restored the common cup to the laity, Anglican sacramental theology has always held that the benefits of the sacrament do not require the reception in both kinds.
6. Personal touching will always be a matter of individual choice but banning the passing of the peace would be an over-reaction at this time. However, people's own needs should be respected, and nodding or bowing are quite acceptable ways of sharing the Peace, if so desired. Also, minimal contact while distributing communion is also recommended – if it is your custom to touch/hold/squeeze the communicant's hand when offering them the host there is greater chance of contamination from coming into contact with unwashed hands.

For more information about the status of the virus, remember that the best source is not the local or international media, but rather, the World Health Organization and the Canadian Ministry of Health:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

We are not yet at a stage where we need to go beyond these general health guidelines. In the event that there is a wide pandemic, we will issue guidelines for a highly infectious environment.

As we journey into our Lenten pilgrimage, we pray that appropriate care for one another in this wilderness of uncertainty, will be grounded in the love and compassion of Christ.

Blessings,

Robert