



## Diocesan Update on Coronavirus Response

Yesterday, Governor Roy Cooper declared a state of emergency for North Carolina in response to the recent spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) within state borders. It sounds scary, but a [state of emergency](#) actually is intended “to enable government officials to take extra measures to protect the public.” We have been in this situation before, most notably following the hurricanes of recent years. During his press briefing, the governor did specifically mention that those in high-risk groups – such as the elderly and those with health issues – consider avoiding large gatherings, including sporting events and yes, church.

### What does this mean?

It means the governor has reinforced the recommendations in place from the start. Those in higher-risk groups have always had to measure the effects of attending well-populated areas and events. We certainly will not bar anyone from attending church, but we will help provide ideas and steps to implement so that those who may choose to stay home might still be included, and those who attend will be kept as safe as possible.

### What do we do?

Last week we issued a [statement of support](#) for any adaptations our clergy saw fit to implement. Given the developments of the last several days, including the governor’s announcement and the [guidance released by the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services yesterday](#), we are going deeper and requiring congregations across the Diocese of North Carolina to implement the following guidelines at least for the remainder of Lent:

1. The Common Cup: Though the low risks associated with the common cup have been widely shared, sometimes eliminating even that low risk can be of benefit. Therefore, we are temporarily suspending the offering of the common cup. It is well established that communion is complete with the offering of only the host. By suspending the use of the common cup for a one-kind Eucharist, you will not be denied the promise offered by the usual communion of wafer and wine. Eucharist is a moment of unity, so not even celebrants will partake of consecrated wine, and they will be sure to cleanse their hands before distributing the host. As we said before, the risk of infection is low by partaking of the communal cup, but it is our desire to eliminate that risk altogether.
2. The Peace: The peace, though it may be our preference, does not require the rituals we often maintain. The offering of the Lord’s peace to each other does not require physical contact, only the sincerity of the offering, which can be done by word alone. If a physical movement is desired, we ask that a substitute be used, such as a wave, a bow, or even the use of “[God Loves You](#)” in American Sign Language. There are many options, and these we will not dictate, only that physical contact be avoided.
3. The Baptismal Font: As can be done, all baptismal fonts and other communal water sources should be drained, as the dipping of fingers in these vessels can be a source of spreading germs.

4. Passing the plate: The passing of the offering place from hand to hand should be avoided. Consider implementing an easily accessible space where offerings can be placed by those doing the giving. Again, the goal is to minimize physical contact as much as possible.
5. Eucharistic Visitors: Though we know this will be difficult, we request the suspension of lay Eucharistic home visits as they put both the visitor and parishioner at risk. For now, we ask only clergy undertake home visits. That said, we *highly* encourage phone calls and utilizing video conferencing technology like Zoom and Google Hangouts to conduct pastoral and social visits; all are a great way to stay connected.

### **Why are we doing this?**

Let us be clear: We are not implementing these measures to fan the flames of fear. Exercising caution and giving in to fear are two very different things. We are exercising caution and strengthening preventative measures to ensure our communal worship life continues, and all who wish to do so can enter the doors of their church feeling safe and protected in beloved community.

We are called to ensure we are doing our utmost to care for one another. We especially must be mindful of those who are vulnerable because of age or a health issue. But we also must remember that while many of us can follow the recommendation to work remotely, others who share our pews may have employment that precludes them from working in an isolated environment. We must safeguard those among us who may not have the safety net of health care or the financial security that would allow them to miss work or self-quarantine as a preventative measure. We understand some might not like the idea of a touch-free peace or the suspension of the common cup, but we owe it those more vulnerable to do what we can to protect them. We are in this together.

### **What else can we do?**

Take expert advice: Continue to follow the recommendations provided by health organizations. Wash your hands often. Pay attention to the cleaning of often-used and communal surfaces – in churches, this means altar rails, pews and other common areas. Remember to gather your information from [reputable sources](#).

Stay connected: Find alternate ways to include those who may need to stay away from group situations. Perhaps you can livestream worship services on Facebook Live, or hold a special prayer service in that same forum. Put phone lists into practice – enlist the help of others to call those unable to attend services, either to check in, pray together or simply to let those who cannot come to church know they are remembered.

Self-monitor: Be aware of how you are feeling, and be honest with yourself if you are feeling [symptoms](#). If symptoms develop, stay home and take care of yourself. This is not a time to be a hero or “power through.” The kindest thing you can do for yourself and everyone around you is to take care of yourself. ***This applies as much to clergy and worship leaders as it does to members of the congregation.*** For clergy facing illness, please contact [the Rev. Canon David Sellery](#) or a member of the [congregational support team](#), or use the [diocesan supply request link](#).

Join the conversation: Starting this Thursday, March 12, the Diocese of North Carolina is holding video calls via Zoom every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 8:30a.m. for clergy, vestry members and other church leaders who would like to discuss this ongoing situation. The goal of the calls is to provide a forum where church leaders may ask questions as well as share insights, experiences and ideas. To join the call, [use this link](#) or call in by phone at 1-646-558-8656 (Meeting ID: 515 271 142)

Bookmark the resource: The Diocese of North Carolina has [curated reputable resources](#) for individuals and churches. These resources will continue to be updated as this situation continues.

Listen to local authorities: When it comes to discerning the wisdom around church-related gatherings, including coffee hours, Bible studies and other events, we encourage you to monitor advisories by local authorities, especially on the city and state level. At this time, we prefer that decisions in these areas be based on local information rather than blanket protocols.

Remember, these are temporary measures. We will re-evaluate as Easter approaches, as our hope is the landscape surrounding this virus will have greater clarity. We pray that by the time we celebrate our risen Lord, we may again be shaking the hand of our neighbor and taking communion from the common cup. That our communal life continues even as we navigate these changing waters is a testament both to your faith and the strength of the church leadership across the Diocese of North Carolina.

Until we may again sip from the common cup and pass the peace with a touch, please continue to care for yourself and each other, and remember that we are blessed to be guided by the love of Jesus Christ today and every day.

At the center of our care for one another in beloved community is the gift and resource of prayer. Let us hold one another in prayer as an expression of our love, and as a sign of our hope in the one who always walks with us and whose name is love, Jesus.

*God of the present moment,  
God who in Jesus stills the storm  
and soothes the frantic heart;  
bring hope and courage to all  
who wait or work in uncertainty.  
Bring hope that you will make them the equal  
of whatever lies ahead.  
Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided,  
for your will is health and wholeness;  
you are God, and we need you.*

-Adapted from New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 765

Yours faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Sam Rodman  
Bishop, Diocese of North Carolina



The Rt. Rev. Anne Hodges-Copple  
Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of North Carolina

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

[Mitigation recommendations – NC Dept. of Health Services](#)

[About “one kind” communion](#)

[Diocesan resources](#)