

SACRAMENTAL RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS ...

-WORSHIP & ARTS COMMITTEE, SYNOD OF ABT

We believe and teach that God comes to us and reaches out to us spiritually and physically. This is part of the meaning of the incarnation of Christ, and of his death and resurrection. Through Christ, and through one another, God touches, blesses, forgives, embraces, and heals us. Sacramental churches such as the Lutheran Church have always seen this as part of the meaning of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, in which physical elements (water, bread, and wine) are passed from one person to another.

This also occurs for us in non-sacramental rites such as marriage, confirmation, ordination, healing, blessing, and commissioning, when the hands of the minister are placed upon the participants in the rite. It also occurs in the “peace”, when Christians in our culture shake hands or embrace one another. We do these things because God has first reached out and touched us, and because we believe that part of our calling as members of the communion of saints is to reach out to others with God’s blessing and healing touch. It is a sign of community within the church that we share God’s blessings and gifts to us through persons and things we touch and share.

Certain regions of our country are occasionally faced with threat of infection by mysterious disease. Although the threat is not the same everywhere in Canada, many of God’s people, especially the elderly, are fearful of being fatally infected.

How can we dispel our fears and continue to reach out to one another sacramentally and personally, conveying God’s healing touch without fear, while at the same time taking reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of infection?

Liturgically, our fear and caution have to do with the administration of **Holy Communion**, and to a lesser extent of **Holy Baptism**, the sharing of the **Peace**, and the **imposition of hands and anointing** which are part of other rites. Here are some suggestions.

ALTAR GUILDS:

Show special care in cleaning and washing sacramental vessels, preparing them and placing them in the church sanctuary before use. Ensure that you have washed your hands thoroughly before touching sacramental vessels and elements.

PRESIDING MINISTERS, ASSISTING MINISTERS, COMMUNION SERVERS

Wash the hands well immediately before each celebration of Holy Communion, **in as public a way as possible**, so that the assembly is assured that this is taking place. If you prefer not to do this at a credence table near the altar, leave the nave and do so in a washroom or the sacristy during the offering/offertory.

Those who administer the common cup should make full and ample use of the **entire purificator** to wipe the lip of chalice inside and out. Rotate the cup from communicant to communicant. A confident and reassuring gesture is also offered when the presiding minister is the last one to commune

The administration of the bread may be as vulnerable to the passing of infection as wine. It is hands touching the **bread**, as well as lips touching the **chalice**, which are a potential source of infection. Some have suggested that exclusive use of **wafers** rather than a loaf, would reduce the risk of infection. This is possible. However, if the presiding minister’s hands are washed before communion, this should not be problem.

INTINCTION: Advise the congregation that intinction may not be as safe as once thought. It make be best to avoid this practice during flu season.

COMMUNION IN ONE KIND: Our theology of concomitance assures us that Christ is fully present in, with and under each element alone. Communicants who fear infection from either cup or loaf can be assured that communion in either element alone is sufficient to constitute sacramental participation.

WINE: Wine contains alcohol, which is an antibiotic agent. A full-strength wine, and not a light wine should be used, to maximize this. The use of grape juice in a common cup offers no antibiotic protection, and should be avoided.

BLESSING OF CHILDREN: In congregations where non-communing children come forward to receive a blessing, the Presiding Minister normally places a hand on the child's head. As an alternative, the presiding minister may make the sign of the cross over the child without physical contact..

SHARING THE PEACE

Fears of infection through shaking hands at the "peace" have been expressed. If this is a concern, there are two other possible alternatives. One is simply to **bow** to the person to whom one is offering God's Peace. Another is to adopt a traditional **Asian** form of greeting: hands folded at face-level, accompanied by a bow.

IMPOSITION OF HANDS AND ANOINTING

These manual acts are part of the rites and liturgies of confirmation, marriage, ordination, healing, and Holy Baptism. Thorough washing of the hands immediately before the Rite, in as public a way as possible, will protect the recipients from infection, and assure recipient and assembly that proper precautions have been taken. Preparation of **fresh oil** for each occasion of anointing will ensure that infection is not passed from one person to another through re-used oil.

Careful precautions which respect the health of others should be used at **all** times in the church's rites and sacraments, not just in times of fear and crisis. It is our hope that these suggestions and guidelines will be of assistance to congregations and other gatherings of the church where rites and sacraments are celebrated.

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