

From the Rector

Guidelines to follow at St. Mark's-in-the-Valley in response to COVID-19 (coronavirus or 2019-nCoV)

In order to support the health of the community at large and our faith community, St. Mark's-in-the-Valley is responding to the emergence of COVID-19 (coronavirus). **Each person has it in their power and control** to take measures to reduce the likelihood of getting or spreading the infection.

Once you have read these guidelines and as we practice them, please share your thoughts and insights directly with me (in person, by text or by calling 805-245-4921 or emailing randall@smitv.org) as the outbreak continues. The following guidelines **will change as needed**. The sooner we are comfortable accommodating these new realities, the more we can be at ease with them. If the epidemic worsens generally or specifically in our area, we will be able to offer an online worship service if we are unable to gather in person.

For now:

Come to Church!

1) As long as you are feeling well and have not been in conscious contact with persons and places of known exposure to the virus, then continue to worship as usual. **Gather for strength** in connection with God and our faith community in the face of the unknown. **Gather to pray** for our world, for all who are responding to this crisis, for all who are suffering with the disease and with loss.

Stay and pray at home if even slightly ill

2) If you are not feeling well, if you have even a mild fever or are sneezing or coughing, please **rest and recover at home**. If your illness is a conventional cold or flu, **everyone will look forward to seeing you soon, when you recover**. If your illness is protracted, and if COVID-19 becomes widespread in our area, St. Mark's will offer online services. Also please **let me know about your health status by text or calling 805-245-4921, or emailing randall@smitv.org**.

We're disinfecting and everyone can help. BYO hand sanitizer or use ours.

3) St. Mark's is stepping up efforts to disinfect surfaces (restrooms, doors, furniture and equipment) and asks for your help. Disinfecting wipes and sprays are widely available on campus – **please use the wipes or sprays to keep surfaces clean. It takes very little time for you to use a spray or to wipe down a counter, faucets, door knobs, etc.** By **working together**, we can dramatically reduce the threat of surface transmission.

*At all times, **avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth*** – where germs enter the body. If you *need* to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, *use a disposable tissue or paper towel* as a barrier and dispose of it in a trash receptacle.

If you have to cough or sneeze (perhaps from an allergy), please use a **disposable tissue or paper towel as a barrier** and dispose of it in a trash receptacle. If you do not have a tissue or paper towel, please **use your elbow**, but that practice, while an

effective way of shielding particles, is understood to have drawbacks, leaving germs on clothing.

Bring smiles to share

4) While we are a warm and embracing community, we need to limit or adapt physical contact. Offer a smile, a slight bow, a wave or back pat instead of the usual handshake, hug, or kiss. In fact, these adapted greetings will be more welcoming because **all can be at ease**. Also: **keep your distance**. We don't have to be in each other's faces to talk. We'll have some seating in the chapel so we can **spread out a bit more than usual**.

Related: the exchange of the peace is an element of the liturgy that can be practiced in a **brief and less physically demonstrative way** without undermining the larger significance of all of us gathering together for the celebration. The current practice of the peace is comparatively recent (late 20th century) and can be accomplished in a **reduced but still meaningful way** by: remaining in your pew or seating area, offering a smile, a friendly nod or slight bow, and exchanging the message "peace be with you," "peace," or similar to those right around you – **without** the customary physical expressions (as noted above). By greeting fewer people and less physically, all can be at ease during the liturgy. Some have suggested bumping elbows or feet or similar – all of which anyone is welcome to do – but seem unnatural and awkward.

Everyone responsible for their own clean hands

5) While clean hands are generally an expectation for the liturgy, we will **enhance hand-washing among the lay and ordained ministers at the altar** (clergy, acolytes) by handwashing during the offertory music (in the nearby church restrooms or sacristy) as well as using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. **Everyone** is asked to please **wash your hands before coming to church and while at church and please use alcohol-based hand sanitizer** (your own or St. Mark's) prior to coming to the altar. In this way, while receiving communion, clean hands are meeting clean hands (but, as usual, don't worry about children's hands having stains from paint or playing... or adults having stained hands due to work – sanitization, not appearance, is the key).

A note about intinction: the practice of dipping the host in the communion wine, **is not (has never been) a safe alternative** to drinking from the chalice. **The opposite.** While the practice of intinction has expanded, with the false thought that it is safer, intinction causes many people to place their hands on the inside of the chalice and in the wine itself, **endangering all who partake** in that way.

Medical experts agree that the danger of transmitting communicable diseases by sharing a chalice is negligible. History has borne this out and this ancient liturgical practice is still highly encouraged in normal times.

Still, the current **COVID-19 virus presents many unknowns** and potentially erring on the side of safety is our path forward.

Handing out small cups of communion wine (as in a protestant communion service) presents transmission challenges as well, even if one person hands the small cups to each communicant.

The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven...

6) Long-standing (centuries of) Eucharistic theology maintains that **one receives the entire sacrament in either kind of the Eucharistic elements** (either the bread or the wine). So it isn't "necessary" to receive the consecrated wine. In a wise move, Bishop Taylor, our Bishop, has directed that **Communion wine may not be offered** in the churches of the Diocese of Los Angeles. He notes: "**the work of the sacrament is complete when taken in only one kind**. If I have taken the consecrated host, I receive no additional benefit from the consecrated wine." He adds that **the restriction will be lifted as soon as the current crisis has abated**.

Bishop Taylor includes in his directive this understanding: "Above all, we want you to be safe. We know that you want your neighbors kneeling or standing at your side to be safe. I understand that **most of us, deeply wedded to our shared practice, will not welcome these directives**. On behalf of our whole diocesan community, I thank each of you for **giving of yourselves self-sacrificially** for the sake of the whole body of Christ."

Offering plates

7) The offering plates will not be passed from hand to hand, but will be placed near the entrances and near the altar steps where you can add your offering.

Sunday refreshments

8) **Coffee and tea will continue to be available after the Sunday morning services**. Those who are making coffee and hosting are asked to observe frequent hand washing practices, as well as surface and utensil cleaning and disinfecting. Further, in considering light food snacks to offer, many churches are advising only commercially prepared and wrapped food items. At the very least, anything offered is best individually wrapped or displayed without the need for a guest to touch other food items to pick up what they are going to enjoy. St. Mark's has on hand small plates as well as napkins, disposable cutlery, and serving utensils.

I am asking the Vestry to develop a system of **wellness checks** among the faith community, including, especially, older people and those who live alone. ***If you would especially like to be included in a regular wellness check*** because you are older or live alone, please feel free to let me know (by text or by calling 805-245-4921 or emailing randall@smitv.org).

Please keep up-to-date on regular procedures to use at home, in your school, workplace, or out in the community. Among other resources, the Centers for Disease Control website is quite useful: **cdc.gov**.

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.

In the face of all this, don't be anxious, get plenty of rest, and eat as healthily as you can. Finally, as the Bishop of Olympia (Washington state) counseled: "**let's be 'the Church' in this.** We cannot hunker down or simply disappear, but indeed we must, and we can, help others. We can, and should, pray, but also work for the good of the whole. That is certainly a real trait and signature of a professing Christian."

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Randall Day", with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

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