



9077 Atlee Road,
Mechanicsville, VA 23116
(804) 559-9302
allsoulsva.org

March 5, 2020

Dear Friends,

As you can imagine, this week I've spent time listening to the news about the COVID-19 coronavirus, reading the CDC's information on the status of the virus, reviewing communications from our diocesan office, talking with fellow clergy, and reading Bishop Susan's response to concerns about Flu and the Coronavirus. All Souls will continue to monitor the situation and has made a plan of response.

A friend in ministry recently quoted the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as calling people to "planning not panicking" in response to the possibility of a COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak in our country and in the world. In consultation with the Wardens of the Vestry, taking advice from the CDC, The Diocese of Virginia, and from other parishes around The Episcopal Church, here are the steps that All Souls Episcopal Church will follow going forward.

Step one: As long as the coronavirus is not in our local area and numbers stay low around the country, we will continue to take the CDC's advice – *wash our hands!* Continue to use hand sanitizer. Please also know that priests, chalice bearers, and acolytes will wash their hands before worship, and we will use hand sanitizer before serving at the altar. If for some reason any of us need to touch our faces, we will reapply hand sanitizer.

If you're not feeling well, *stay home and take care of yourself*. Let us at All Souls know that you're not feeling well, so we can support you however we are able.

At this stage, we will not alter our worship and community life. For now, we will continue to offer both a common cup (chalice from which to drink) and an intinction chalice (a chalice to dip your bread)

In following the Bishop's advice and other dioceses, we are however, asking folks to refrain from intinction (dipping of the bread or wafer into the wine). Research shows that the risk of contamination from fingers touching the wine is far greater

than that of sipping. Between the high alcohol content of fortified wine and the wiping of the rim, the risk of infection from sipping is quite low. If you are uncomfortable sipping from the chalice, please know that the Episcopal Church believes in the doctrine of concomitance – in other words – Christ’s body and blood is present in each of the eucharistic elements. You are welcome to receive only the bread and after receiving it, cross your arms over your chest for the wine.

Step two: Should the coronavirus find its way to Virginia; we will ask people to exchange the peace in ways that do not involve touching. Examples of this include waving, giving a peace sign, verbally exchanging of the peace, blowing a kiss. In regard to Eucharist, we will all practice concomitance (Eucharist of bread only), and we will move to using wafers instead of loaves of bread. We will also consider cancelling non-essential large gatherings such as Wednesday Lenten Supper and Program.

Step three: If the coronavirus become an epidemic in our area, the governor declares a state of emergency, and/or the CDC recommends closing schools and other public gatherings, we will cancel meetings, gatherings, and public worship until the virus is contained. We will live-stream worship through Facebook Live or something similar, so we can continue to worship together.

As Bishop Susan pointed out in her online meditation, our country and our world has been through this before, and fear is a natural response. Let us remember God’s continual message to us – *“Do not be afraid.”* Having a plan helps our community know that we are taking the actions necessary to care for our community and for one another. As we have in the past, keep reaching out to one another and saying hi. Check on one another. The community of All Souls is great at that! Let us not allow fear to isolate us.

And please join me in prayer – prayer for those impacted by the virus, prayer for the medical and government folks working to address the issue, prayer for our loved ones who are around the world, prayer for those whose livelihoods and income are threatened, and prayer for those on the margins.

Holy and gracious God, give us the strength to meet the health crisis growing in our world. 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. All this we ask through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen

Much love to you all,
Katherine+