

The Anglican Church in America
Diocese of the Northeast
Office of the Bishop Ordinary

Pastoral letter

March 15, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This letter comes to you with every good wish for a Holy Lent. It also comes to you with prayers for your safety during this time when we are facing a health emergency from a disease called the coronavirus or COVID-19.

Given the constant flood of news from the media, I do not doubt that you have all been made aware of the coronavirus. No doubt you have also been instructed in various means of self care, such as frequent hand washing. We have also been discouraged from traveling to certain countries, participating in large gatherings of people and practicing self-quarantine when we feel ill. All these practices and cautionary reminders are designed to assist us in remaining healthy and, when ill, to prevent us from spreading disease. I certainly encourage you all to follow the guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control.

When it comes to Holy Communion, you have several choices. You may choose to accept the Sacrament in one kind. The Sacrament is entirely valid when you receive the bread only. You may also choose to receive by intinction or to forgo communion altogether. You may also decide to remain home for the duration of the coronavirus outbreak. Your clergy will certainly understand.

However valid the CDC guidelines may be for the maintenance of health and the containment of disease, they fail to recognize the vital importance of sustaining a healthy spiritual life. As Christians we are all aware of this necessity. As clergy, we are charged especially with maintaining and teaching spiritual health. We all join a church for the spiritual refreshment that the secular world is simply incapable of providing. A spiritually healthy congregation prepares us to weather the temporal storms that frequently come our way. And they do arrive with regularity. Jesus teaches us that we need not fear the storms of human life. Though He would certainly ask us to protect ourselves from those frequent earthly disruptions, He would also teach us not to fear. All shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well. Our spiritual lives are just as necessary to our survival and represent, in a very real sense, our eternal existence.

Last week, several of our clergy gathered at the Genesis Spiritual Life Center in

Westfield, Massachusetts. We discussed our response to the coronavirus at great length. Though we acknowledged the need to observe the health guidelines as presented by the Centers for Disease Control (and we practiced sacred “elbow bumps” for good measure), we also recognized the necessity of providing healthy pastoral care to God's people. How that is practiced in each parish is left to the able leadership of our clergy. I give thanks for the dedicated clergy in our diocese, men who seek to care for their flocks with love and a great commitment to God's service.

How you choose to worship during the next days and weeks (whether in your parish church or at home), is entirely your choice. But you should always be aware that your deacons, priests and bishops will continue to pray for you, seeking always to demonstrate the love of God, a love that exists in this world, a love that is practiced without fear.

Last Friday, as the clergy celebrated Mass, we recited the collect for the Second Sunday in Lent. Can there be a more perfect collect for this time period? It seems as if it were written just for us – and for our particular challenge now in 2020. Perhaps, in a very real sense, it was.

Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Your Brother in Christ,

+Brian