



Greetings, people of the Diocese of New Westminster

I want to continue to offer updates and further guidance to all of you as the COVID-19 outbreak increases and progresses, and as more information becomes available to assist us all in guarding our health, the health of other parishioners and the health of members of the communities where we live. Please post this communique as well as any other updates from me on COVID-19 on your parish websites and social media platforms.

On February 6, I sent a general communique to the Diocese ([linked here](#)) and last week I sent out a Pastoral Directive to clergy on specific practices that we must now follow in the administration of communion ([linked here](#)).

Given the rise in cases in the Province, I want to give additional mandatory guidelines to all in the Diocese about the next level of behaviours we must adopt at this time. This comes in response to the latest update from B.C. health officials [which you can view here](#).

I also want to highlight what we might do to prepare for a possible time when we would suspend gathering in our churches (worship and other meetings) for a period of time. **Notification of this will come from my office.** Please know that it's very challenging to stay current on this emerging situation. We're doing our best to give you the best guidelines we can as this situation changes.

Mandatory Guidelines

1. **Continue to emphasize basic healthy practices.** We need to continue to emphasize the practices that individuals need to take to decrease the likelihood of viral or bacterial infection (washing hands, sneezing or coughing into our sleeve, not touching our faces, using hand sanitizer with 60% or more alcohol, disposing of tissues after using, not coming to gatherings or visiting others when sick).
2. **Strengthen and increase the frequency of the sanitization of spaces and surfaces:** Where possible, we need to use antiseptic cleaners (a bleach solution or other effective antiseptic cleaners) for surfaces that people in our parishes touch (e.g., tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, sinks). We also need to increase the frequency of cleaning our spaces and surfaces.
3. **Withdraw the Common Cup entirely for a time.** While there is no evidence that the Common Cup is a threat to health, as concerns about touching any surfaces become greater, I now ask you to withdraw the Common Cup entirely for a period of time. What this would mean is that the celebrant would consecrate a cup of wine and would leave it on the altar during the administration of the bread, after which time, the celebrant would consume the wine. To simplify things, the celebrant and only the celebrant should administer the bread. In larger congregations, the clergy and only the clergy should administer the bread.
4. **Drain the font and any Holy Water stoups:** We need to drain the water from all fonts and Holy Water stoups, and suspend the practice of dipping the hands or fingers in the water of both. If we are doing baptisms new water needs to be used for each person.

5. **Greet people with a smile and a wave:** The point here is no physical contact at all. Yes, this may be difficult! It's a new habit and will take a little while to get used to.
6. **Exchange the Peace through looks and gestures only.** Some of you are already doing this (bowing to one another or engaging in some other gesture at the Peace). Again, the point is discontinuing physical contact.
7. **Suspend the practice of sending out lay Eucharistic visitors to take communion to care homes or to the homebound:** Sadly, sending lay Eucharistic visitors should be ceased for now simply to decrease the likelihood that the lay Eucharistic visitor or the most vulnerable in care homes or in their own homes could be exposed to viral or bacterial infection. Any home visits a priest feels must happen needs to be restricted to ordained persons who must follow very strict protocols in what they do.
8. **Suspend passing the offering plate.** Please do not pass offering plates or baskets from hand to hand. Instead of people touching plates or baskets, put the plate or the basket in one spot and ask people to come to the plate to put in their offerings.
9. **Suspend Coffee Hour:** In order to eliminate the possibility that viral or bacterial infection could be transmitted through food or beverage, we will need to suspend coffee hour.

Preparing for the possibility of suspending church gatherings and suspending all gatherings in our church buildings

My advice on this is for clergy to convene their lay and ordained leaders as early as tomorrow, and to work through both how at the parish level people will stay connected to each other in the event that the parish must suspend worship and other gatherings for a time. Parish leaders will also need to work through what the implications might be for shutting down the church building entirely to any operations (e.g., rentals, to include other churches that meet in our spaces, day care centres, etc).

In terms of parishes staying connected during a time of suspended worship and other church gatherings, leaders might consider:

- Parish Facebook groups and posting updates as well as posting video sermons there.
- Collecting/strengthening email and phone contact lists (with people's permission) so that e-list updates and messages can go out periodically so that a group of leaders and/or communication people can call on others to see how they are doing.
- The use of the parish website to keep people updated and informed and as a place to post sermons (text or video).
- Using ZOOM (if you are signed up) to offer Morning Prayer on a regular basis.
- Providing links or materials for people to do Morning or Evening Prayer on their own.
- The use of YouTube for worship/sermons etc.
- Any provisions you need to make for the finances of the parish.

Another area that parish leaders will need to consider is their own office operations. We at the Synod Office are in conversation right now about this. Know that we will be doing everything we can to continue essential operations that are important to all of us if and when we have to suspend our office hours for a time.

Please know of my ongoing love and prayers and concerns for all of you and our communities at this time. And please watch for additional news as this situation emerges.

*In Christ,
+ J. Melvin*