

Dear St. John's,

Throughout this week I have been in conversation with the leadership of the church regarding the precautions that need to be taken in response to the increasing spread of coronavirus. While at this time we do not think it is necessary to cancel worship or other church gatherings, we will be making a couple of changes to worship on Sunday:

- During the time of greeting at the beginning of worship, **we will not be shaking hands**. We are currently exploring several options that will allow us to warmly greet one another without any physical contact. We're going to try to make this fun, so please indulge us!
- During the offering **we will not be passing the offering plates**. Rather, the ushers will be holding the plates in the front of the sanctuary, and you will be invited to come forward with your offering and any prayer cards.
- Depending on what takes place with this virus over the coming weeks, we are already establishing a plan for how we will share communion on April 5.

You may have noticed that hand sanitizer is hard to come by in stores. We have a large pump bottle of it in the front of the sanctuary (by the baptismal font), and a couple of smaller bottles that will be stationed at the other doors. Feel free to bring a bottle with you for use after touching doors, etc. But again, **we are actively discouraging any physical contact on Sunday morning (like handshakes, hugs, fist bumps, or cheek kisses)**. Even touching elbows like we did this past Sunday is discouraged, since doctors are advising us to *cough* into our elbows to prevent the spread of germs with our hands.

If you are sick, or if your immune system is already compromised, we are lovingly asking you to please stay home. Not just for the sake of others, but for your own sake. A weakened immune system could make you more susceptible to catching something from someone else. This would include those who are recovering from recent surgery, those who are undergoing treatment for cancer or other chronic illnesses, and those who have respiratory illnesses.

If you are exhibiting symptoms like a fever, cough, and shortness of breath, please contact your doctor. Do not just ignore this. In this case it is better to be *proactively* wrong than *retrospectively* wrong. Please use your best judgment and trust your instincts.

If the situation changes in such a way that it becomes necessary to cancel worship or other church events, we will let you know as soon as possible.

I know that this might seem excessive, but there is so much uncertainty surrounding this virus right now that it is better to play it safe. I would rather you think that I'm crazy and be *healthy* than to not take this seriously and risk putting our church family at risk. And while it might sound funny to say this

after everything I have said above, **please do not panic**. There is a difference between panic and preparedness. We are simply trying to proactively provide for your safety and health in a way that will allow us to continue gathering for worship and fellowship. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me.

The final thing that I would ask of you is to pray. Prayer settles hearts, gives direction, creates empathy, and prayer changes things. Pray for those who are sick. Pray for those who are afraid. Pray for those who have no access to health care. Pray for doctors, nurses, and public health officials. Pray for St. John's, that we might continue to glorify God, even in the midst of uncertain times. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Grace and peace,
Patrick