



THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

STANDING COMMITTEE

March 5, 2020

Dear Faithful People of the Diocese of South Carolina,

On behalf of the Standing Committee I write to remind us all that as the COVID-19 coronavirus continues to spread across the world, we are confronted with an awareness of how we might want to be together as the Church and also work to minimize the spread of disease. At the core of Christian theology and in line with the life and witness of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a care and concern for others beyond our own self interest. That basic tenet of Christian belief and practice reminds us that measures to protect others from the spread of disease ought to equal or exceed the desire to preserve self. That is to say, we don't just take safety measures to preserve ourselves, but also and more importantly, we take the necessary measures to protect our neighbor.

Our friends at Episcopal Relief & Development have provided helpful resources to calm our fears about the spread of the disease and to remind us of our responsibility as "compassionate Christians." In their series of [guidelines for faith-based response to epidemics](#) they remind us that our role in these times is to:

- Combat fear with knowledge in order to encourage preparedness and decrease stigma.
- Maintain operational continuity and continue worship life in the case of potential quarantine and disruption.
- Show God's compassion and care to those in our communities who are affected.

The guidelines also include specific information about the virus, as well as resources for church bulletins, liturgical guidelines and resources, advice for churches, and more.

Dr. Robert Ball is a Professor of Infectious Disease at the Medical University of South Carolina and member of St. Stephen's, Charleston. He offers the following tips: 1) Use common sense as you would with the common flu, 2) Use fist or elbow bump or prayerful nod, 3) Cough and sneeze into your sleeve, not into your hand, and 4) Wash your hands frequently.

As Episcopalians, we make most contact with each other in worship when we share the peace and the common cup. According to the *American Journal of Infection Control* (Vol. 26, No. 5, 1998), "no documented transmission of any infectious disease has ever been traced to the use of the common communion cup." Still, if a parishioner desires not to receive the common cup, it is perfectly acceptable to refrain from receiving this element of communion. Likewise, it is appropriate during the peace to acknowledge those around you with a smile, a kind word, and a wave or other non-contact gesture.

As with all health threats, the key is to be prepared, but not panic. The current concern about coronavirus reminds us of our common life and ministry, the importance of watching out for the neighbors around us who may be in need of assistance, and also reducing the risk of spreading the virus through common sense measures of frequent handwashing and staying home if feeling ill. Every precaution recommended for the coronavirus is good advice during every cold and flu season, and always following these precautions is a simple way to follow the second great commandment: to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Faithfully yours,

The Reverend Canon Caleb J. Lee
President of the Standing Committee