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## Responding to Concerns Surrounding Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Updated March 12, 2020

In response to the recent news about the coronavirus (COVID-19), our prayers to God are for those who are ill with this virus and for those who care for them, especially in countries that have been most affected. We also pray for health and frontline workers as they face their daily tasks. And we remember those communities and businesses that have been affected and any facing discrimination as a result of the circulation of the virus.

Public Health officials tell us that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to any virus. General prevention measures include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Stay home if you have influenza/respiratory virus symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, trouble breathing).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands.
- If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Currently, the risk of getting COVID-19 in Canada remains low. There has been no call from Public Health officials to implement additional measures for public activities. However, it is wise to review practices related to pastoral care, programming and public worship to keep everyone, especially the most vulnerable, safe.

### Matters for congregations to consider:

- Worship
  - Make hand sanitizer available in the worship space and throughout the church building for all to use.
  - Use alternate forms of greeting to hugs, handshakes, etc., if or when necessary.
  - Take precautions to reduce the number of people touching communion elements and trays.
  - Use individual communion cups rather than a common cup with grape juice.
  - Place a box of tissues in every pew.
  - Encourage people who use our churches to wash their hands and post reminder signs throughout the church.
  - Regularly wipe down commonly used areas touched by churchgoers, like door handles, pew tops, and railings, regularly.
- Pastoral Care
  - Elders, visitors and all pastoral care workers should take all necessary precautions in personal hygiene before and after pastoral visits in hospitals and homes.
  - Remind people who are ill to stay at home in order to recover.
  - Remain in contact with those who may be vulnerable or quarantined to ensure that they have their spiritual, social and physical needs attended to. While electronic communication is useful for disseminating information at once to a large group, the telephone is still the best way to keep in touch with people pastorally who may be feeling isolated. Ensuring that those who are sick or isolated for any reason have the things that they need is also an important act of pastoral care.

Congregational leaders are encouraged to monitor the situation by reviewing news releases from local Public Health authorities and taking appropriate actions when necessary and as advised. The Government of Canada provides updates as well as other health safety practices and resources at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>