



The Incorporated Synod
of the Diocese of Toronto

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April 29, 2009

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Today the news media alerted us to the reality that the Swine Flu Influenza virus is present here in Ontario. Yesterday, four cases of Swine Flu were confirmed in the GTA.

On April 27, 2009 the World Health Organization (WHO) moved its international Pandemic Alert from Phase Three to Phase Four. The status of Stage Four requires the Diocese to activate its Pandemic Response Plan.

Please do not panic about this. Activation of the Diocesan Pandemic Response Plan does not mean that we are experiencing a fully developed pandemic influenza event. The WHO, while raising the level of the alert, stresses that progressing through to Phase Six is *not inevitable*.

Throughout history, our Christian tradition reminds us that the Church can be an agent of calm, reassurance and compassion during times of uncertainty. We are called by Christ to tend to those who are sick, fearful or anxious. As leaders, you have a critical responsibility in this.

Please be alert to the implications and precautions of this emergency:

- Review the Diocesan Influenza Response Plan on our website: www.toronto.anglican.ca/images/Pandemic_Plan_4.pdf. I draw your attention to the Checklist for Congregations, Appendix J, page 25.
- Please review and observe those protocols outlined regarding liturgies and the common cup.
- Public health officials are discouraging the use of face masks but are encouraging the public to observe basic public health guidelines such as regular and frequent hand washing, social distancing when necessary, and the use of hand sanitizers. Additional information is available through your local public health unit or can be found at www.toronto.ca/health.

Mission:
To worship God and proclaim
Jesus Christ in the power of the
Holy Spirit and to embody
—in word and action—
God's reconciling love, justice,
compassion and liberation—
through which knowledge of
God's reign is extended.

- For regular updates regarding this Swine Flu Influenza event, click on the links identified on the Diocesan webpage.
- Consider contacting your local public health unit. Contact information can be found at www.publichealthontario.ca.

There are additional pastoral response resources within the Diocesan Pandemic Influenza Response Plan.

You might suggest some of the following to lessen the concerns of anxious parishioners:

1. Use hand sanitizers regularly. Hand sanitizers can be made available in the Narthex of the church and sidespersons can encourage their use to worshippers.
2. If an individual feels uncomfortable exchanging the peace, a gentle bow to ones neighbour suffices as a greeting.
3. Anglican liturgical tradition allows for receiving communion in one kind only. Therefore, if an individual chooses not to receive from the common cup, such action should be supported. Intinction should always be discouraged.

In all cases, celebrants and servers must use hand sanitizers in the preparation of the elements and before and during communion during the Eucharist.

I would also encourage clergy to model basic principles of healthy living, including taking time to rest adequately. If you feel ill, tend to your personal health. Maintain best practices of hygiene while visiting sick parishioners through the use of hand sanitizers and hand washing. If your parish supports ministries of healing or visiting, ensure that volunteers are informed of necessary precautions. If need be, suspend especially high risk ministries until circumstances permit them to resume.

Lastly, but importantly, if you have a parish nurse, utilize her / his role as educator both within your parish and the larger community.

The World Health Organization and Canadian Public Health officials indicate that this current pandemic influenza event will grow more severe over the next few weeks. We as a Diocese have a wealth of resources, skills and abilities. I believe we are well prepared to meet the challenge which may lie ahead.

In Christ,
Yours faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Colin R. Johnson
Bishop of Toronto

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