



# SELC DISTRICT Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

## **The Coronavirus – What YOU Need to Know**

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) is the cause of concern for many people. Because of this concern, the District office has put together some information for the Church with regard to general health information about COVID-19 and also information for you and your congregation regarding how best to handle questions and concerns about the Coronavirus in the church's life together.

### General health Information for Church workers, volunteers and members.

- Wash your hands frequently and wash them for at least 20 seconds each time you wash your hands. This is the best method for stopping the passage to others.
  - If you touch your face, nose, or eyes, wash your hands.
  - Note: It takes about 20-25 seconds to sing the Common Doxology. Sing this every time you wash your hands and you will be doubly-blessed.
- If you are sick, please stay home so you do not spread germs to others. This is especially important if you will be around people who have chronic diseases or are compromised, health wise, already.
- When you have to cough, please cover your mouth. Please dispose of all soiled tissues.
- Use disinfectant wipes to clean those areas that are touched by multiple people or by people who are ill. For example, your telephone, your door handles, your keyboard on your computer if you share your computer, light switches, etc. Use your sleeve to touch elevator buttons, door knobs, etc. as much as possible.

### Concerns related to the Church buildings and functions.

There are many questions being raised about the virus and how it can, will, should affect our interactions at Church. Here are some suggestions to think about in your congregation:

- Stop shaking hands as people enter Church and pause your sign of peace during the service. Smile and wave instead!
- Make sure you have adequate paper towel and tissue supplies so that your dispensers are always stocked.
- Have dispensers of hand sanitizer in all areas of your church gathering spaces outside the Sanctuary – as you enter or leave the Sanctuary, in your fellowship hall, in your meeting rooms. If you have a school associated with your Church, have them at the entry and inside each classroom.

- Empty waste receptacles daily. Custodial staff or volunteers should wear disposable gloves.
- In addition to door handles and computer keyboards, churches should also consider sanitizing the altar rail, the baptismal font and other commonly touched objects more frequently.

### Concerns about Holy Communion

These are important matters because shared meals, baptisms and human contact are central to the practice of our Christian faith. When it comes to the Lord's Supper and our practice of Holy Communion, regarding the spread of germs and viruses there is little actual data or observed experience to support a concern with regards to health.

There have been a number of studies examining participation in Holy Communion and the spread of viruses and infections. Several of these studies are cited in an appendix in the Altar Guild Manual published by Concordia Publishing House which has been authorized by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Commission on Worship. This appendix directly examines the use of the common cup. [<https://www.cph.org/p-671-The-Altar-Guild-Manual-Lutheran-Service-Book-Edition.aspx>]

Notably, some of these studies include one on the use of the common cup conducted by professors Burroughs and Hemmers in 1965 and reported in the Journal of Infectious Diseases. Another, in 1985, was a study done by Dr. David Ho in the New England Journal of Medicine over concerns about the spread of the AIDS virus in saliva through common eating and drinking utensils. This same subject was presented at the 97th General Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology in May of 1997, and in 1998 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention published an official position about the risk of infectious disease transmission from a common communion cup.

The consistent findings of these studies are summarized accordingly: "Although we are not able to absolutely rule out the danger of transmission, the danger seems to be **slight to none**. There has been **no indication** that those who receive communion have more illnesses or are at a higher risk than the public at large, and there has **not been a case** of a community outbreak of infectious disease related to its spread via Holy Communion."

While very few of you practice intinction, it is suggested that those pastors who do stop the practice of intinction, or dipping the communion bread or wafer in the wine. This is probably the least hygienic way to distribute communion because our hands are often the dirtiest parts of our bodies and the most likely to carry disease.

With regards to the host, good hygiene of those who preside at the Altar and those who assist should always be paramount, but especially now when there are extreme health concerns. Those handling the elements, including the pastor, the servers and the Altar guild preparing the table, should wash their hands, and sanitize preferably with an alcohol-based (minimum 60%) hand-sanitizer (At Concordia, we simply use Vodka to cleanse our hands and purify the vessels between tables.).

There is still an ongoing debate whether it is best to distribute the host directly to the communicant, versus placing it the communicant's hand. If the former, the host is distributed without it touching any contaminated surface (like the person's hands). If the latter, the

concern is that the Pastor may touch the person's mouth or face and be contaminated. Each pastor should decide for himself what would work best in his own situation.

The current recommendation is that you continue with your normal practice of receiving the Lord's Supper. Do note that any "exceptions" or "emergency practices" that your congregation institutes will often become "the norm" after the emergency passes. Be prudent. Exercise responsible caution.

If you have a specific question or concern about your congregation's Communion, please contact President Vinovskis for a consultation.

#### From the LCMS on Communion

The Common Cup: <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/faqs/doctrine#sick>

#### A model letter to a congregation about Coronavirus

<https://mailchi.mp/11f997cd043a/hclc-pastoralletter-concerning-coronavirus?e=aa3403d5c1>

#### Practices from other Church bodies

- Greek Orthodox: Amid fears of a broader coronavirus contagion across the country, the Holy Synod, the ruling body of the Greek Orthodox Church, recently issued a statement saying that the disease does not transmit through the distribution of holy communion by the chalice.
- Roman Catholic: Holy Communion: All priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to wash their hands with soap and water prior to the celebration of Mass. A hand sanitizer may be used in the pew by the extraordinary minister prior to the distribution of Holy Communion. In addition to the usual purification of fingers with water after the distribution of Holy Communion, all Communion ministers should again wash their hands.

#### General health links about the Coronavirus

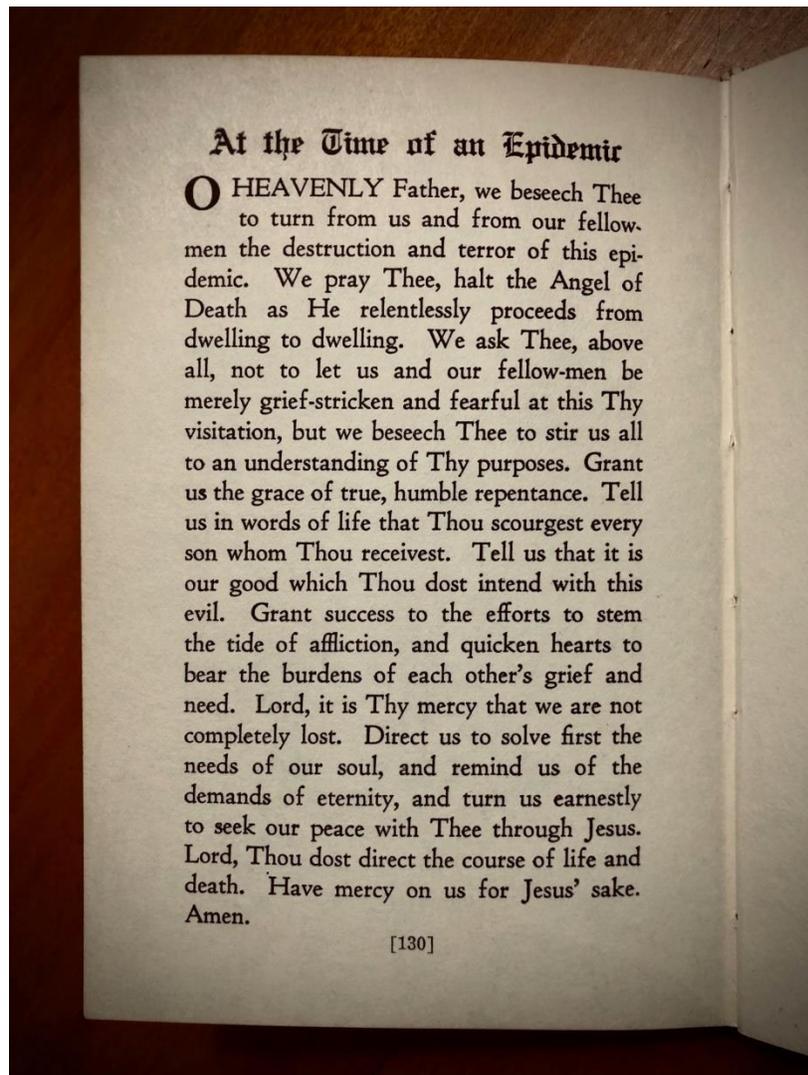
- CDC – Center for Disease Control - [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1hxqXW9WAE5pcOtOrVjI2UjL9QE\\_wewNNxdlihSyRWn3nd8IXFFS3zWHo](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1hxqXW9WAE5pcOtOrVjI2UjL9QE_wewNNxdlihSyRWn3nd8IXFFS3zWHo)
- The Mayo Clinic - <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/covid-19-information-on-symptoms-transmission/?fbclid=IwAR3ZmrJ2sB0Xvk7B7ka5DX1TjrrilPXZepncTftizMJ4gnNgD6MOzRPJrZg>
- Harvard - <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/as-coronavirus-spreads-many-questions-and-some-answers-2020022719004?fbclid=IwAR0kw8IT1qFFMt0oliiv8diUnKh1ruJvnhp25W6KHGFNaN0roznMr32aAc#q1>

## LCMS links about the Coronavirus

### ➤ Blog links

- <https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/coronavirus-nothing-new-about-disease-or-the-need-for-the-gospel/>
- <https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/synod-monitoring-coronavirus-news-missionaries-safe/>
- [http://htlcms.org/2020/03/luther-on-epidemics/?fbclid=IwAR2tt9v4jI2T7JLgqRNzEL\\_ezSEj6Ir2UphirQdKz5\\_bMU5F1akJGGG3nKE](http://htlcms.org/2020/03/luther-on-epidemics/?fbclid=IwAR2tt9v4jI2T7JLgqRNzEL_ezSEj6Ir2UphirQdKz5_bMU5F1akJGGG3nKE)

## A prayer



Most importantly...

Wash your hands.

Wash your hands.

Wash your hands.

Don't touch every random surface in somebody's house and don't eat random food out of their refrigerator.

Wash your hands.

Clean your hands.

Un-dirt your hands.

Your hands; have you washed them recently?

Give us clean hands, oh Lord.

Wearing a mask is fine too, but mostly, wash your hands.