

Dear People in Niagara

As I write this letter the World Health Organization has raised the World Wide Pandemic Alert to level five, indicating that we may be very close to a Pandemic. I want to reassure you that we take this very seriously. We believe that we have adequate plans in place and will continue to monitor the situation closely and make any other changes that may become necessary. Your health is our most important concern. Together we can meet this challenge. We are fortunate that because Ontario had the experience of SARS our public health officials and your diocese have had plans in place to deal with this eventuality. This afternoon I participated in a conference call with the other Bishops in Ontario. This letter reflects the consensus we have reached. We decided not to withdraw the chalice at this time.

The Diocese of Niagara Emergency/Pandemic Response Plan and our web site contain a number of parish resources. If you have not done so already, I suggest you follow this link ----- and review them. I have asked Dean Peter Wall to provide a prayer for public and private use. Additional devotional and Scriptural resources may be found as part of the Response Plan.

This is the first time this policy has been activated. After the present crisis is over we will look forward to your comments on how we can improve it. Now is not the time for innovation. Do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or concerns. The most important things you can do are:

- Wash your hands carefully and regularly using soap and water whenever possible
- Sneeze or cough into your sleeve; if using a tissue or handkerchief wash your hands following use
- Clergy who are feeling ill should avoid pastoral duties which involve physical interaction with others
- Parishioners who are feeling ill are requested to stay at home
- Anglican tradition allows for receiving communion in one kind only; members should continue to feel free to decline the chalice
- Intinction (dipping the bread into the chalice) is not allowed in this diocese since it is a potential health hazard
- If you feel uncomfortable exchanging the peace, you may wish to gently bow to your neighbours. Greeters should be sensitive to those who wish to avoid hand shaking before and after worship.
- Extra care should be taken in cleaning the worship area, especially railings, doorknobs etc that we touch with our hands

I am encouraged by the faithfulness of the clergy and laity of this diocese ensuring that everyone involved in presiding at worship and administering Holy Communion washes their hands. If you are not doing so already, consider providing alcohol based hand wash for members of the congregation.

I am sure that all of us will continue to uphold the people of Mexico who are at the centre of this health emergency as well as our own health care and public health workers. Above all, the clergy and other parish leaders are called to be a non anxious presence in the midst of so much uncertainty.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Michael A Bird

Bishop of Niagara