

Dear Hamden Plains Church community,

The health of our church community is of great importance. In light of the flu season and the spread of COVID-19 (the coronavirus), a group of church officers, medical professionals, and the pastor met last Sunday to determine a response.

The purpose of this article is not to debate the degree of severity of transmittable illness or the media's reporting of it. The purpose is to identify and implement steps to respond to a health threat about which much is unknown; and what is known is a threat to older persons and those with pre-existing conditions.

Our recommendations and/or planned changes in practice follow. These will be adapted as needed and used for as long as needed. You are free to contact any of those listed at the end of this article to share observations and concerns. The following topics were covered:

### **BASIC PRECAUTIONS**

As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local health departments, follow these basic steps to resist illness:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. If you use a tissue, throw it in the trash, then wash or sanitize your hands.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

### **HOLY COMMUNION**

We will resume using individual, disposable Communion cups. **(1)** Stewards (those preparing the elements) will wash their hands and use clean gloves to prepare gluten-free bread, and grape juice in individual cups, before worship.

Celebrants (those distributing the elements) will continue using hand-sanitizer, as they have been, before distributing Communion elements.

Worshippers will be encouraged to use hand-sanitizer that will be provided at stations near the service line prior to receiving the Communion.

The method of distribution at the front of the sanctuary will remain unchanged: bread and cups will be handed to worshippers with elements consumed standing. Empty cups will be given to an additional celebrant whose purpose it will be to collect these. Worshippers may kneel in prayer at the Communion rail after receiving if they wish. Those unable to come forward will be served in their pew, as is our current practice.

**(1) The use of grape juice in individual Communion cups evolved, interestingly, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as two developments occurred simultaneously: new understanding of microbiology and how disease is spread; and the ability to preserve grape juice without fermentation.**

### **FELLOWSHIP TIME**

Hosts will serve prepackaged food and beverages procured by the Fellowship Time Coordinator. Hosts will be expected to use hand-sanitizer and guests will be encouraged to do so by placement of a station near the table. The host is encouraged to hand out the prepackaged items to discourage picking through items.

### **GREETERS AND USHERS**

Greeters and ushers will be asked to greet with a warm and friendly smile but to avoid handshaking.

### **THE PEACE**

The Peace (“passing the peace”) will be moved to the end of the worship after the postlude as a segue way to Fellowship Time. Worshipers will be invited to extend the peace of Christ with a smile, a wave, the “peace sign,” or with folded hands and the ancient Sanskrit greeting “*Namaste*” (“*the divinity in me salutes the divinity in you*”) instead of handshakes or embraces. The latter potentially increases transmission of illness and is uncomfortable for some people, especially visitors.

### **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

We will research possibilities for live-streaming and/or broadcasting recorded worship, which some churches are doing already, for those who cannot or should not be in contact with others.

We recognize that change is not always easy or welcomed. Still, these simple changes increase the likelihood of protecting the health and well being of our congregation, using common sense and not fear as we continue to gather and worship together.

Respectfully submitted,

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