

March 6, 2020

From the Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, Texas:



Peace be with you all, friends and family of St. Stephen's!

I am writing to you in response to the growing concern about Coronavirus 2019 (or COVID-19). St. Stephen's cares about the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of everyone in our community. In response to COVID-19, your church leadership has been in an ongoing dialogue with experts and medical professionals to make sure we can best meet our people's needs. We want to keep you informed without stoking fears--to help everyone take proper precautions while avoiding unhelpful panic.

To that end, we are carefully monitoring the spread of COVID-19. Based on current information, these are the recommended best practices in our parish at the moment:

- We will continue to hold regularly scheduled worship services and church events until otherwise advised. We ask that anyone who is ill remain home just as we would someone who has any other contagious illness, and we ask anyone who has compromised immune systems to take the same precautions they would during other times of spreading illness.
- We ask everyone to wash their hands regularly--especially before and after meals and social gatherings--with soap and water for at least 20 seconds each time, as per CDC guidance for daily hygiene.
- During all worship services we are temporarily suspending shaking hands during sharing the Peace. We ask everyone to offer one another the same nods, waves, "elbow bumps," and heartfelt "Peace be with you" we do whenever anyone is ill.
- During all worship services we are slightly altering our communion procedures. Beginning this Sunday, to give ourselves practice should a change be necessary, we will no longer be intincting (the practice of dipping the bread into the chalice of wine). Intincting is an easy way to transmit contagious illnesses from hand

contact and we do not wish to put the community at heightened risk. Instead of intincting, we offer the following options concerning the administration of wine:

1. Drinking from the chalice (decades of research have shown this to be a safe way to avoid transmitting contagious illness)
2. Receiving the bread and a blessing instead of the wine (the church centuries ago established that receiving either the bread or wine alone is fully receiving the entirety of the sacrament)

These practices have been recommended by health experts as the best way to reduce the risk of transmitting contagious illnesses of any kind, including COVID-19. As of this writing, there has yet to be any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our area, but I will continue to monitor and promise to keep you informed of any changes and any additional measures we take to protect the community's well being.

In conversation with members of Episcopal Health Foundation and Episcopal Relief & Development, I am confident that we are in good hands. We will continue to care for one another as a community--combatting fear with knowledge and preparedness, maintaining our ministry engagement in the community in safe ways, and offering compassion for all who are in times of trial--as I believe Christ calls us to in this world.

Finally, the former teacher in me compels me to offer additional study material, so I have included below a list of resources which I have found to be helpful, should you wish to be empowered with more knowledge. Please also know that I am here for you to answer questions, converse, and pray together. Schedule a time to meet or reach out by phone (409-892-4227), text (313-405-3995), or email (sbalke@ssecbmt.org).

At this time and in all times may we be continually reminded of God's loving presence in our lives and in the call we answer as the Body of Christ. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'S'.

The Rev. Steven M. Balke, Jr.

Further Resources:

From *Episcopal Relief & Development*, “Faith Based Response to Epidemics”
episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics

From *US Surgeon General Jerome Adams*, “Be cautious, but not afraid of Coronavirus”
[cnn.com/2020/03/03/opinions/coronavirus-prepare-not-panic-opinion-adams/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/03/opinions/coronavirus-prepare-not-panic-opinion-adams/index.html)

From *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, “Coronavirus Disease 2019
Frequently Asked Questions and Answers”
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html)

From *American Journal of Infection Control*, “Risk of Infectious Disease Transmission
from a Common Communion Cup”
[tnli.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Common-Cup-CDC.pdf](https://www.tnli.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Common-Cup-CDC.pdf)

From *The Episcopal Diocese of Texas*, “Coronavirus Guidelines within the Episcopal
Diocese of Texas:
epicenter.org/health-resources