

The Most Reverend Anne Germond



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Wednesday, January 29, 2020

Dear Friends in Algoma and Moosonee:

I write to you concerning a new virus, the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which has been featured prominently in the news media over recent days. It is important for the people of Algoma and Moosonee to be informed not only so we can take appropriate precautions, but also to ensure we are caring and faithful in our response.

What is the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)?

Coronaviruses are a category of viruses that infect mammals and birds, causing respiratory infections in humans. Typically, coronaviruses cause mild infections such as “the common cold.” However, more rare forms like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), first reported in February 2003, can cause serious illness and even prove lethal. SARS caused the death of around 800 people worldwide in 2002 and 2003.

This new coronavirus first came to the attention of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the final days of 2019, when WHO was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, located in the Hubei Province of China. The virus did not match any other known virus, which raised concerns about the possible ways it might affect people. On January 7, 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had identified the new virus, and it was designated 2019-nCoV.

How Concerned Should We Be?

Thus far, the spread of 2019-nCoV has been quite limited outside of China. As of this afternoon, there have been no reported deaths caused by the virus beyond China, and almost all confirmed cases were acquired in that country, primarily in the city of Wuhan. Of the 133 deaths attributed to the virus in China, almost all have been in Wuhan.

Again, as of this afternoon, Canada has only three positive cases, two in Toronto and one in British Columbia. Each of these individuals acquired the illness in Wuhan and was quickly isolated. To date, there is no evidence that the virus has been spread in Canada. Moreover, our Ontario healthcare system has proven protocols in place, and there is every indication it is as prepared as possible to deal with this development.

Therefore, there is no reason to panic or speculate, and we must avoid spreading rumours and fueling fear.

At the same time, this is an excellent time to stay informed, and to ensure we are engaged in the best hygienic and pastoral practices as individuals and as a community of faith.

How Should We Respond?

From where I sit, it seems to me there are a number of practices and precautions to which we should attend.

Prayer: I echo our Primate's call to pray for "...those who are ill with this virus and those who are caring for them, especially those at the epicentre of this outbreak in China." Please include them in the liturgies of your congregation, and as you pray each day in your homes.

Stand Against Fear and Injustice: Please make sure you stay informed by reliable sources so that you have accurate facts. Of even greater importance, it pains me that already the Canadian Chinese community is experiencing an uptick in racism and xenophobia as a result of fears concerning the Novel Coronavirus. We must guard against fear and injustice in ourselves and stand against it in our society.

Hygiene in Pastoral and Liturgical Settings: There have been no calls from public health officials for additional measures in public activities. However, it is important we attend to our best practices in personal behavior, pastoral care, and public worship for the wellbeing of all, particularly those most vulnerable due to age, illness, or other infirmity.

WHO offers the following recommendations for reducing exposure to, and transmission of a range of ailments and diseases, including 2019-nCoV:

- Frequently clean hands by using soap and water (minimum 20 seconds) or alcohol-based hand rub.
- When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with tissue or, if necessary, flexed elbow (throw tissue away immediately, and wash or sanitize your hands).
- Avoid unnecessary close contact with anyone who has a fever and cough.
- Seek medical care early if you have fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, and be sure to share previous travel history with your health care provider.
- If visiting live markets in areas currently experiencing cases of 2019-nCoV, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals.

- As per good food safety practices, avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products. Raw meat, milk, or animal organs should be handled with care to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods.

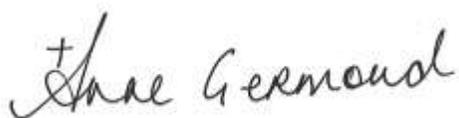
In the church building or other pastoral contexts:

- Ensure hand sanitizer is available in the worship space for parishioners, particularly those serving in the liturgy. In consideration of others, make use of the sanitizer before and after sharing in times like the Greeting of Peace and Communion.
- There is no need to ritualize fear, altering or obscuring the symbolic meaning of our liturgical practices. Instead remind people through the worship leaflet, verbally before the liturgy, and in other forms of parish communication, that our church understands the fullness of Eucharistic Communion to be shared fully even if a person partakes of only the bread or the cup. Therefore, to protect others from illness, or if a person feels vulnerable to illness, it is acceptable to receive the bread alone. If desired, people not partaking of the wine may choose simply to touch the base of the cup as it is presented to them.
- Share the national information re: Eucharistic Practice and the Risk of Infection, available at <https://www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/pir/euc-practice-infection/> It was prepared by Algoma's own Dr. David Gould.
- Remind parishioners that it is in their best interest and that of their siblings in Christ to stay home and receive appropriate medical care when they are ill. Assure them they may request home communion or a pastoral visit, if either is desired.
- Clergy and other pastoral visitors should take all precautions in personal hygiene before, during, and after visits in homes, hospitals, and other institutions.

You will find more information and regular updates on the Novel Coronavirus in Ontario and across Canada at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov#section-o>

In the earliest decades of our Faith, and in many generations since, people were drawn to Christ in large part because of the love and service of believers who cared not only for one another, but also for those beyond their number. In times when the fear of disease can cause people to isolate themselves from one another, let us take due precaution. However, let us also be known for our compelling witness to the love of God as a result of our generous and compassionate care, of our “unusual kindness.”

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Germond". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a small cross symbol above the first letter of the first name.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma and Moosonee