



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

First Presidency Statement Sacraments, COVID-19, and Social Distancing

19 March 2020

During the COVID-19 pandemic priesthood members will be asked to provide various sacraments. In all instances, priesthood members should respect public health guidelines that state people should practice “social distancing” and avoid, as much as possible, personal contact through which the infection spreads. In these unusual circumstances, the Presidency offers guidance related to the sacraments.

Sacrament of Laying on of Hands for the Sick

In many instances it will not be possible or wise for Melchisedec priesthood members to implement all the elements of the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick, such as anointing with consecrated oil and physically laying hands on the recipient. In these situations, as an exception to normal procedures, the Presidency advises offering a special prayer for the sick from an appropriate distance or through telephone or virtual technology. This may be done with assurance that in exceptional circumstances such prayers are effective, and divine grace abounds through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Presidency recognizes that some priesthood members may choose to provide the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick in person in its complete form. If this is done, serious attention must be given to all guidelines from health experts about how to remain safe when physically close to or touching a person who is ill or might be ill. Likewise, priesthood members must be aware that they could infect others through their presence or touch since one may be a carrier of the virus without having symptoms. It is essential to respect all safety protocols provided by health experts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Other Sacraments Involving the Laying on of Hands

Other sacraments involving laying on of hands or personal contact should be delayed until further notice, if possible. Requests for individual exceptions for other sacraments should be directed to the field apostle, who will consult with the First Presidency before responding.

Social Distancing and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Guidelines for serving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper when priesthood members and recipients are in different locations have been provided to the church (www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Guidelines-Lords-Supper-9-2019-EN.pdf). See the section about “Online Participation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper” for details.

If the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is requested by individuals at home or in health-care facilities, the Presidency advises priesthood members to offer the option of an online experience whenever possible. If that method is not

possible, and the priesthood member decides to offer the sacrament in person, every effort should be made to minimize the risk of infection to all persons involved. Remember, the virus may be spread by close personal contact and passing items between persons.

Rationale for Exceptions

These recommendations are based on the church's call to provide responsive pastoral care while protecting the most vulnerable. Also, the Presidency has prayerfully considered Doctrine and Covenants 162: 2d during this time of global health crisis.

You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.

The Presidency is grateful for priesthood members who are providing pastoral care and servant-leadership during this time of increasing need and stress. We deeply appreciate the combination of wisdom, spiritual sensitivity, and creativity that is apparent as we join with others in lessening the spread of COVID-19 while continuing to offer ministry that makes visible the Worth of All Persons and the Blessings of Community.

The First Presidency