

Statement from the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, on H1N1 'swine' flu

Thursday 20 August 2009

A number of clergy have asked how we should respond to the outbreak of H1N1 or 'swine' flu, especially in the light of the recent statement issued by the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, which recommended the suspension of the sharing of the chalice at communion. This followed advice from the UK Department of Health to the British public not to share 'common vessels' for food and drink.

Within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, we should observe prudence in maintaining good hygiene and in taking care to reduce exposure to infection.

There has been legitimate alarm around this pandemic, as at least 6 people have died from swine flu. All of life is sacred and we regret the loss of this precious life. Yet we should not panic, but rather be prudent about our health. If you are not well, it makes sense to behave as you would with any of the other strains of flu that we experience each year. We should take care not to expose others needlessly to the virus, and to remember the tried and trusted practices of covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands regularly and so forth.

I have spoken on the phone with Prof Adrian Puren, an Anglican who is a virologist and a professor at the National Institute of Communicable Diseases. He has confirmed all the above. Thus, we are encouraging prudence, and asking those who may have swine flu (or indeed, normal winter flu) to take special precautions, to reduce exposure to others, and to take proper account of adverse weather.

Issued by the Office of the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town
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Note to editors - The Anglican Church of Southern Africa, which Archbishop Makgoba heads, encompasses Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, St Helena, South Africa, Swaziland and Tristan da Cunha.