

MASSACHUSETTS CHURCHES ARE CLOSED BY EPIDEMIC

*Numerous Deaths Due to Influenza
— The Bishop's Anniversary —
Boys' Clubs — Plans for Corpo-
rate Communion*

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MASSACHUSETTS experienced a churchless Sunday, yesterday. At the urgent request of the boards of health of the various towns and cities and the State Public Safety Committee, most of the Protestant churches in and near Boston closed their doors.

Spanish influenza is the cause. Never has Massachusetts faced such an epidemic within the memory of the oldest residents. The epidemic is practically in every community of the state. It is said to have started in the receiving ship, *Commonwealth Pier*, among the naval men, but I think that the origin is still uncertain. But there is no question about the existence of the epidemic. It is the most depressing situation that any of us have ever faced. And yet there is not the slightest suggestion of panic. As far as possible people are continuing to do their regular work. But all public and parochial and private schools, movie picture shows, and theatres have been closed for several days. And on Friday the boards of health in many towns reinforced the request of the State Committee of Public Safety by requesting the churches to close. It is difficult to determine yet how generally this request was heeded. Trinity, Emmanuel, and the Cathedral Church of St. Paul publicly announced in advance that in compliance with the official request of the Committee of Public Safety there would be no services. Probably only eastern Massachusetts will be vitally affected by this request for the present.

The attitude of the Boston Health Department relative to church services during the epidemic is set forth in a letter to the clergy issued by Commissioner William C. Woodward. He says in part:

"The health commissioner cannot undertake to determine for the clergy what does or does not constitute a 'public gathering' necessary for the due exercise of religious devotion.

"He begs, however, that the clergy, bearing in mind the gravity of the situation, will interpret the order liberally, and will restrict religious gatherings, with respect to frequency, numbers, and duration, in so

far as may be compatible with a proper exercise of the offices of the Church.

"In making this request the health commissioner feels assured of the hearty co-operation of the clergy of Boston."

It is difficult to determine yet whether the epidemic is increasing or diminishing in and near Boston. The Boston papers each day for the past week are publishing about five or six columns of death notices (about fifty deaths to a column) most of which seem to be caused by influenza. During the past ten days I have personally officiated at seven burial services. A majority of these deaths were from the influenza epidemic. I hesitate multiplying this number by the number of priests in all communities in the district of Metropolitan Boston. Perhaps I have had more to do than others—and yet the Boston papers have not mentioned my community as one of those seriously affected!