

# MEETING THE EPIDEMIC IN MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITIES

*Public Meetings Cease—Bishop Lawrence Urges Intinction—Promotion for Chaplain Rollins—The Bishop's Anniversary*

The Living Church News Bureau }  
Boston, October 7, 1918 }

**T**HREE weeks of influenza in Massachusetts, and still there are no signs of a decrease. In fact the epidemic is more serious in Massachusetts to-day than it was a week ago. And it is now rapidly spreading throughout New England and the whole American nation.

As I wrote my Boston news letter to THE LIVING CHURCH last week, I hesitated stating the facts lest they should seem exaggerated. But I gave them just as plainly as I could; for I believe it is best to face facts fearlessly. I have no reliable figures at hand, but it is my opinion that five thousand people in Massachusetts have already died as a result of this epidemic.

The Associated Press is, I hope, giving the full facts to the entire country relative to this epidemic. It has hardly had time to give some of the lessons which we are learning here in Massachusetts. Some of these lessons may prove of tremendous help to communities and states which are half-heartedly fighting the epidemic in its initial stage:

First, to give the frankest publicity. Too many of the Boston dailies up to ten days ago treated the epidemic as if it were a state of mind. The average reader therefore avoided worry but not necessarily contagion.

Second, to close absolutely, so far as possible, all public places where people gather for any length of time. After hesitating for two weeks, Massachusetts has temporarily closed all public, private, and parochial schools, saloons, movies, theaters, even the official meetings of men to fill out questionnaires relating to the draft.

Third, to close churches for public worship. Practically all of the Protestant Churches in Massachusetts closed their doors last Sunday in deference to "the request" of those in authority.

Mayor Peters on Friday issued a stronger appeal to the Boston Churches, especially to the Catholic Churches, as practically all of the Protestant Churches had closed the previous Sunday.

"Our city at present is suffering from the most terrible epidemic in present memory; an epidemic that seriously threatens the health of the community and defies medical treatment. It is causing untold suffering and imperils our efficiency in our great national struggle. To prevent the further spread of this disease every possible step should be taken and every sacrifice should be made.

"The mayor's emergency committee and the health commissioner of the city of Boston have both, as a measure of medical emergency, urged me to appeal to the church authorities to suspend all gatherings of

public worship. Not unmindful of the need and solace of religion at this time, it yet seems imperative to comply with every health requirement that the best medical advice tells us will tend to lessen the spreading of this disease. I therefore call upon you most urgently to suspend at once all gatherings of public worship until the present crisis has passed and indications are given that the people with safety to themselves and the community can mingle again together."

The cities and towns outside of Boston have made more drastic regulations regarding the closing of churches. In case the epidemic continues to increase, such regulations may be adopted by the Federal government. The official regulations just enacted by the Winthrop Board of Health provide that from noon on Saturday, October 5th, till 7 A. M. on the 14th, "no assemblage or gatherings to exceed in number ten persons, including officials, shall be held in any church, hall, school, or other place in Winthrop without written permit from the Board of Health. Within the same period, no public funeral shall be held over the remains of any person in the town of Winthrop without a written permit from the Board of Health; and . . . no gatherings or assemblages to exceed in number ten persons, including attendants, shall be held in any house in Winthrop where there is a deceased person."

In the midst of this awful epidemic the natural leadership of Churchmen appears in community efforts. In almost every community in Massachusetts where our Church has a parish house this building is the logical center for emergency Red Cross work. Grace Church parish house of New Bedford is already fitted up with seventy cots for an emergency hospital. The parish house of the Church of the Ascension, Fall River, is being used as an emergency canteen, supplying meals for families where there is sickness. In every community that I have heard from our Churchmen and Churchwomen are nobly working for their communities.

Again, Church vestries are sending out appeals to parishes to send the weekly offerings by mail. The vestry of St. John's Church, Winthrop, has just sent such a note, explaining that as the parish "is supported by weekly pledges and voluntary offerings, the closing of St. John's even for a brief period of time immediately creates a serious financial problem."

The clergy are suddenly faced with many appeals from those in need. The minister in charge of St. James' Church, Roxbury, makes the following appeal which is typical of many:

"There are many families in Roxbury so very hard hit by influenza or pneumonia that the income of the breadwinner of the family is cut off, and there is no money immediately available to pay for the necessary nourishing food, nor any help at hand to prepare it in the home. In this emergency the district nurses' headquarters and the liberty bread shop are working

together to cook and deliver such food to these families. The associated charities are finding funds to pay for the cost of this work for many of the needy families. But there are others that cannot be thus provided for. I have promised the district nurses' headquarters to provide the cost of as many of these really necessary cases as I can. They will report them to me as needed. The rector's discretionary fund has a very small balance which I shall gladly use for this purpose. Will some of you feel it a privilege to add something to that fund? Little or much may be needed; there is no way of telling in advance. I should regret to be obliged to turn down any such application from the nurses for lack of funds."

Finally there has developed a new appreciation for intinction in administering the Holy Communion. When Bishop Lawrence first gave permission for churches in this diocese to use intinction in administering the Holy Communion eighteen months ago, only a few parishes at once accepted it. But gradually during the past eighteen months the number of churches using intinction has increased. Among this growing number are all types of Churchmanship. The following letter which Bishop Lawrence sent to the clergy of Massachusetts will add to this growing number:

"October 4, 1918.

"MY DEAR BROTHER:

"Acting upon medical advice and my own judgment, I am taking the liberty of suggesting to you the advisability of the administration of the Holy Communion by the method of intinction, at least for the present. Experience has shown this method to be reverent and acceptable.

"The cup should be shallow, and a very small amount of wine is needed: a tablespoonful for twenty-five to one hundred communicants is ample. Wafers should be used. They may be obtained by mail from the Sisterhood of St. Margaret, Louisburg Square, Boston.

"In administration, the cup with the paten and wafers can be held in the left hand and fingers. The priest dips the corner of a square wafer or the edge of a round one very slightly, not more than a quarter or an eighth of an inch, into the wine. If he does so with reasonable quickness, the wine is immediately absorbed, and the wafer can be placed on the palm of the hand of the communicant. Or the priest gives a wafer to every person kneeling at the rail, then takes the cup, and as he passes along, each communicant dips the wafer in the wine.

"As each railful of communicants kneels, the whole of both sentences is said before beginning to administer. Then, as the priest administers, he says the first half of both sentences, the second half being omitted.

"If there are communicants who object to intinction and wish the old method, they can come forward after those who receive by intinction have received. In case your congregation is not familiar with the method of intinction, it will of course be advisable for you to make a short explanation at some convenient time in the service."