



DIOCESE OF GARY

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Office of Worship

Chancery/Pastoral Center

MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests
From: Fr. Martin J. Dobrzynski, director
Mr. Kristopher W. Seaman, associate director
Date: 5/1/2009
Re: Swine influenza, the Sign of Peace, and Reception from the Cup

The Office of Worship has received some concerns about the new swine influenza possibly affecting the use of the sign of peace and the reception of the cup during communion.

It should be noted that this particular flu strain is not new (CDC online). Though it is serious it is treatable. Bishop Dale Melczek and the Office of Worship are monitoring the situation through the Centers for Disease Control. If the situation reaches epidemic, as defined by the CDC within our diocesan boundaries, then the Bishop through the Office of Worship will determine whether an entire assembly refrain from shaking hands or from receiving from the Precious Blood.

Those who wash the vessels after they have been purified should once again be informed to wash the chalices in hot soapy water and then towel dry the chalices with fresh towels. Also Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be again informed to wash their hands thoroughly before coming to Mass and if necessary to discretely use hand sanitizer before they come up to the altar area.

We suggest that pastors may announce the following information, in these or similar words, to the assembly. Both an oral announcement and the subsequent publishing in the parish bulletin of the following information might spur a better understanding among some of the faithful:

It is understandable that there is a cautious concern amongst many about contracting this recent strain of influenza. Presently there is no epidemic, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) of swine flu within the Diocese of Gary, yet that does not mean we should not take precautions in regards to this health concern. The sign of peace within the context of liturgy is an invitation to reconciliation, unity and communion between God and all people, especially those present in the assembly. This gesture helps us prepare to receive the body and blood of Christ, the Prince of Peace. Theologically and liturgically, the sign of peace and reception from the Precious Blood are integral parts of the liturgy, and should not be prohibited on a universal basis.

Consequently, turning to the advice of the CDC, at this time there is no need to suspend the Sign of Peace or the reception of the Precious Blood on a universal basis. The CDC actually states that one has a greater chance of contracting the swine flu from a door knob or from particles in the air than from the sign of peace or from the chalice. Regular and normal precautions are the best, the washing of our hands regularly or using alcohol-based hand gels when washing hands is not immediately possible, covering your mouth if you sneeze or cough, throwing away your used Kleenex in the trash as soon as possible, seeking medical attention as soon as you feel unwell and staying home from work and Sunday Mass if you are ill. These simple yet often overlooked steps are the best remedy to safeguard the general health of the community.

If you remain at home due to illness and cannot participate in the Sunday Eucharist, you are dispensed from the obligation to attend and do not incur a mortal sin. At home you are encouraged to pray and reflect with the Sunday readings and if possible to view the Mass on television; the Hallmark channel presents Sunday Mass from Notre Dame.

If you are unsure about the severity of your illness and come to church or are concerned that a fellow worshiper is ill (whether with a cold or worse), during the sign of peace you should courteously offer Christ's Peace by using the usual words "Peace be with you" with a slight bow of your head towards your fellow parishioner. If someone does not wish to offer you the sign of peace in the usual manner at this time please do not judge the person; they simply may be not feeling well or may be more susceptible to illness (e.g. people who are elderly or in a course of treatment that diminishes their immune system) than you are.

Reception of the Sacred Host on the hand is the best way to reduce the spread of infectious germs. So if you are not feeling well or are concerned about your health and usually receive on the tongue you are highly encouraged to receive communion in the hand at this time.

With regard to the reception of the Precious Blood during communion; the Centers for Disease Control has made it clear that the [accident] of alcohol combined with the metal of the chalice poses a most inhospitable environment for germs. Still, for those who are ill, the Precious Blood from the chalice should NOT be taken and as a precaution if you are aware that you are more susceptible to illness than others, you should refrain at this time from reception from the Chalice.