

Liturgy Note

November, 2009

Diocesan Response to H1N1 National Emergency

On Saturday, October 24, 2009 President Obama announced a National Emergency concerning the spread of the H1N1 virus in the United States. This development will continue to cause concern among the faithful in the Diocese of Trenton. Posted on the Extranet are 10 Questions concerning the seasonal Flu and H1N1 that may be helpful to your parishioners. Below are selected questions presented to assist you and your parish staff in developing a response that will ease the concern of the faithful at the celebration of Mass.

1. In previous years, what has the Church done in localities where the outbreak of Influenza is most significant?

In those localities where the outbreak of the disease has been the most significant, bishops have introduced several liturgical adaptations in regard to such practices as the distribution of Holy Communion and the exchange of the Sign of Peace in order to limit the spread of contagion.

2. What measures should be taken in Roman Catholic liturgies in the United States of America now?

Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be especially reminded of the need to practice good hygiene. Ministers of Holy Communion should always wash their hands before Mass begins; a further precaution suggests using an alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. **The faithful should be instructed not to receive from the cup if they feel ill.**

3. What about further adaptations or the restriction of options at Mass?

The Diocesan Bishop should always be consulted regarding any changes or restriction of options in the celebration of Roman Catholic Liturgy. However, the need for the introduction of widespread liturgical adaptations for the prevention of the transmission of influenza in the dioceses of the United States of America is not evident at this time.

1. **What is the Secretariat of Divine Worship doing to address this question?**

While the Secretariat will continue to monitor the situation and provide the best advice possible to Diocesan Bishops and their Offices for Worship, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Diocesan Bishop to recommend or mandate liturgical changes in response to influenza in particular local areas. The Secretariat likewise appreciates whatever information Diocesan Offices for Worship are able to provide concerning local conditions and the pastoral responses developed by Diocesan Bishops. Continuously updated information is available from the CDC at [www.CDC.gov/h1n1fluhttp://www.cdc.gov/swineflu](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu).

At the present time we have not received word that major steps should be taken in reference to the liturgical celebration of the Mass. Ever mindful that the H1N1 virus is around us, pastors are asked to stress to the faithful the need to observe good hygiene. Such practices as washing one's hands throughout the day, coughing into a tissue or one's elbow and refraining from touching one's face; nose, eyes, or mouth.

As always pastors are asked to keep a watch on the local condition in their communities. In those areas where the H1N1 virus has affected many individuals the following liturgical directives may be implemented as an appropriate pastoral response.

- For those who feel uncomfortable with the shaking of hands at the sign of peace, permission for an alternative form for the sign of peace may be instituted; instead of a hand shake, a smile and a bow of the head with the words, "*Peace of Christ be with you*" would be acceptable. As soon as the panic has passed, the traditional hand shake should once again be encouraged as the normative form of the Sign of Peace.
- Extraordinary and Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should review the proper handling of the Cup for the reception of the Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. After each reception of the Blood of Christ the minister wipes both the inside and the outside of the cup and turns the cup for the next one in procession. Research by the CDC has shown this practice does decrease the chance of passing on germs.
- Those uncomfortable with receiving from the Cup should refrain, and parents are to instruct their children on whether they want them to receive from the cup.

- In those areas of the Diocese of Trenton where the H1N1 virus has caused many to get sick, then the pastor may consider refraining from giving Communion in the mouth, since often the fingers of the minister may have contact with the tongue of the one receiving Holy Communion, and then enters into another's mouth without the opportunity to be washed. Reception of Holy Communion in the Hand would be the best option.
- Proper catechesis for these steps must be taken and it is the role of the pastor to ensure that his parishioners know that these steps are temporary until the health crisis has passed.
- Pastors should stress to the faithful that if they are feeling ill: feverish, headache, sore throat, aches in joints, and other flu like symptoms, then they should stay home and contact a doctor. The old excuse of "being on one's death bed" before missing Mass without committing sin, needs to be put to rest.

Pastors and parish staffs are reminded that all these directives are not meant as a permanent change in the style of liturgy proposed and fostered in the Diocese of Trenton. The Diocese fully endorses the availability of the Blood of Christ, at all Masses, reception of Holy Communion on the tongue as an option given to the faithful, and the shaking of hands at the sign of peace.