

## **Precautions Against the Spread of the Flu**

Monday, October 26, 2009

**In response to the unprecedented number of early flu cases that have triggered emergency medical responses at a national, state and local level, the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth Chancellor and Moderator of the Curia the Very Rev. E. James Hart, on behalf of Bishop Kevin Vann, has issued the following guidelines to all parishes in order to help mitigate the effects of the flu.**

**Below are the guidelines, issued to all priests, deacons and pastoral administrators of the Diocese of Fort Worth.**

Because of the concerns regarding the possible spread of the H1N1 Flu that has been detected in North Texas, the Diocese of Fort Worth is asking all our parishes to take precautions to help mitigate its effects. This applies to the entire diocese.

We recommend that all priests and deacons exercise common sense precautions when it comes to the liturgy. Influenza is often spread from person to person through contact with coughing and sneezing of an infected person. Simple hygiene such as washing hands and using alcohol based hand sanitizers at appropriate times can prevent the spread of influenza. If a priest, altar server or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is sick, whether it is the flu or the common cold or whatever, then he or she should not serve until the sickness has passed.

The following liturgical adaptations should be followed as a precaution concerning the celebration of Mass:

- The faithful should be encouraged to not hold hands during the reciting of the Our Father.
- The faithful should be encouraged to share the Sign of Peace without touching hands or kissing. This can be done with meaningful eye contact, smiles and a bow of the head in reverence to one another.
- The faithful should be encouraged to receive Communion in their hands and not on their tongue.
- The cup is not to be shared with the faithful during Mass. Communion is only to be given in the species of the consecrated bread.
- Priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be especially reminded of the need to practice good hygiene. Ministers of Holy Communion must be encouraged to wash their hands before Mass begins, or even to use an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. A good practice is to distribute an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution by the Eucharistic Minister Captain to other ministers while the priest is preparing for distribution of Communion.

In addition to the precautions, we suggest that as a pastor or parish leader, you take the following actions to inform the parish community about what you are doing:

- Your pastoral judgment and pastoral approach are critical to ensuring that these temporary changes are seen as being in the best interest of the faithful, as well as ensuring that no one with special circumstances is excluded from the table.
- Remind parishioners that they should not come to church when they are not feeling well.
- Presiders and deacons should carefully wash their hands before and after Mass, and use an alcohol based hand sanitizer before distributing Communion.
- Hospitality Ministers should not shake hands when greeting people and should be encouraged to carefully wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer before and after their ministries of greeting others, taking up the collection and passing out bulletins at the end of Mass.
- An announcement about the requested changes should be made before Mass begins. Because not everyone is present at the beginning of Mass, it will be important to include a comment about these temporary changes during the homily and/or after the Great Amen and before the reciting of the Our Father.
- If people are invited to greet one another, it should be after the announcement that they are being asked to not shake hands.
- If a non-communicant comes forward for a blessing, the blessing should be given without touching them.
- This is an important time to pay attention to the members of your community who are handicapped and who need to receive on the tongue, or who need assistance in receiving. They should not feel turned away from Communion at this or any other time. Having an experienced minister go to them at the end of Communion and serve them will ensure they are not excluded, and that the minister is then able to immediately go and wash their hands or use hand sanitizer. Announce before the distribution of Communion the when and how the handicapped will receive Communion.