

January 17, 2018

Dear Pastors, Parish Life Coordinators and Parish Directors,

Influenza and the temporary restriction of certain liturgical practices

During times of increased prevalence of influenza, temporary restrictions of certain liturgical practices will help to lower the risk of transmission.

Because of the size of our diocese, a regional approach to any restrictions (rather than the diocese trying to impose them as a whole) is thought to be best.

The leadership of each parish cluster may impose or lift these temporary restrictions as they see fit.

It is recommended that parish leadership develop a rapport with their county health officer, allowing their professional expertise to help inform parish/cluster decisions along these lines.

An updated by-county listing of health officers is attached to this message and will be used to correct the list currently posted on the diocesan website. (<http://www.catholicdos.org/influenza-liturg>)

All of the health officers listed have been contacted by the worship office and were asked to provide assistance to you in determining:

- if temporary restrictions of certain parish liturgical practices may be indicated
- when these temporarily restricted practices may be returned to normal

Liturgical practices which may be temporarily restricted in times of need:

1. The offering of the Precious Blood (under the form of wine) to the assembly via a common chalice (cup) may be suspended for a time. During these times, then, only the Host (bread in the form of a wafer) is offered to the assembly.

Issues to keep in mind concerning this restriction:

- Individual, and/or disposable cups for the Precious Blood are not an option for Roman Catholics.
 - Any remainder of the Precious Blood must be reverently consumed.
 - Some who are extremely gluten intolerant depend upon the availability of this form for their reception of the Eucharist, so suspending it is problematic for them. (Rice-based hosts are not an option for Roman Catholics, only those that are “very low” gluten may be used.)
2. Greeters standing by the doors may refrain from shaking the hands of people as they enter the Church for Mass.
 3. If some in the parish include this practice, all may be instructed to refrain from holding hands during the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer.
 4. The Sign of Peace may be shared without touching hands or kissing.

Ongoing measures which normally should take place during every liturgy in order to minimize the transmission of any disease:

- During Mass, prior to their entrance into the sanctuary, ministers assisting with distribution of Holy Communion should discretely sanitize their hands. The parish should provide the sanitizer and locate it conveniently (yet as discretely) as possible.
- During the distribution of Holy Communion via the chalice, the minister should make good use of the purificator (a clean cloth used for wiping), and thoroughly wipe both the inner and outer surfaces of the chalice where the communicant’s lips have come into

contact with it. Ministers should also turn the chalice slightly between communicants as well as trying to use different portions of the purificator during the wiping process. Fully opening the purificator will allow more of its surface to be used in this way.

Other hygienic practices which are always to be encouraged:

- Promoting clean hands.
 - Parish and school washrooms should be well-equipped with soap dispensers and paper towels. Besides those made available for the Ministers of Holy Communion during Mass, bottles of hand sanitizer should also be made available where other members of the assembly may need to use them (such as near the entrances).
 - Besides sanitizing their hands just prior to their assistance with the distribution of Holy Communion, these ministers should also thoroughly wash their hands prior to their attendance at Mass.
- Encouraging people who are beginning to feel ill to refrain from receiving the Precious Blood during Holy Communion, as it is optional.
- Encouraging people who are sick to stay home. Their obligation to attend Sunday Mass should be balanced with the charitable practice of not endangering the health of others when they may be contagious.

Thank you for your continued attention to this issue. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions/suggestions you may have.

In Christ,

Paul Birch
Office of Worship
Diocese of Superior
715-394-0233
pbirch@catholicdos.org

P.S.

Other information which may be helpful:

Wisconsin flu information

The *Wisconsin Department of Health Services* website has a page dedicated to information regarding influenza in our state:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/influenza/index.htm>

Of particular interest may be the *Wisconsin Weekly Influenza Report* located on the bottom third of the page. The most recent version is attached. According to its page 2 our region in the state (as of January 6) was below baseline. On page 8 our region (Northwestern) is shown to have an upward trend of activity.

Individual, disposable cups are not allowed

Unlike our Protestant brothers and sisters, for whom the reception of the wine (or grape juice) is usually offered in disposable cups, this method (though undoubtedly more sanitary) is not available to us. This is primarily because of our belief in the true and sustained presence of

Christ in the eucharistic elements, which necessitates that each vessel containing them needs to be scrupulously purified of any remaining element (most often through the use of water) and that these contents then be reverently consumed prior to any washing of the vessel. A lesser but still valid concern would be our understanding that the vessels which contain the eucharist need to be worthy of their sacred contents. A former requirement was that that only precious metals such as gold (in practice most often only in very thin, plated form) silver or pewter were allowed contact with the Body and Blood of Christ. This has now been modified to include any material that is both noble and unbreakable, but even with that change nothing disposable would qualify.

Ministers must always reverently consume the remainder of the Precious Blood

Another aspect of communal distribution of the Precious Blood which may need to be taken into consideration is that, as alluded to above, any remaining in the chalice after distribution needs to be reverently consumed. (Then the vessel purified with water, and then that reverently consumed.)

Risk of transmission of disease from the common chalice has been reported by experts as being very low

Back in 1998 the American Journal of Infection Control was quoted as saying, "...the risk for infectious disease transmission by a common communion cup is very low, and appropriate safeguards...further diminish [this] risk."

(See: <http://ntnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Common-Cup-CDC.pdf>)

Celiac disease can make reception of the Precious Blood the only option for some

The increase in celiac disease also is a factor in the decision to withhold the chalice from the assembly. Church law requires that the bread (hosts) we use for the eucharist must contain at least a tiny amount of wheat gluten in order that it be considered valid matter. (Unlike our Protestant brothers and sisters who may avail themselves of rice-based communion breads, we have the obligation to stick with wheat, at least in this very nominal way.) For many Catholics who suffer from celiac disease the use of extremely low gluten hosts is sufficient. However, for some who are very intolerant of gluten, the only way they may receive Holy Communion is via the Precious Blood. (Complete elimination of the chalice for our assemblies would then mean that these individuals would be unable to receive communion.)

The assembly's reception of the Host must always include the option of receiving on the tongue

Since the late 1970's the practice of the communicants' reception of the Host being exclusively on the tongue has been expanded to include the placement of it in the palm of their hand (from there the communicant places the Host in their mouth themselves). In the past, during times of increased rates of infection, some have thought it best to suspend reception of the Host on the tongue, much as the common chalice may be suspended. However, Canon law requires that the manner in which the faithful receive Communion may never be restricted in this manner. (Both options—hand and tongue—must always be available to them.)