

GUIDELINES REGARDING INFLUENZA

This year's flu season brings heightened concerns to everyone with the addition of the H1N1 strain of the influenza virus. All of us are reminded of the need to practice prudence, good hygiene, and proper respiratory etiquette (including sneezing and coughing into one's elbow rather than into one's hands) at all times but especially when the influenza virus is prevalent.

With that in mind, the following liturgical guidelines are offered for parishes:

- Those who believe that they may be coming down with symptoms of the flu, and those who have it, are excused from Sunday Mass. (For your convenience, the Mass from St. Agnes Cathedral is televised each Sunday at 11:00 a.m. and repeated at 7:00 p.m. on Telecare.)
- Those who administer Holy Communion should be especially attentive to the practice of good hygiene, particularly the washing of hands before and after Mass and even the possibility of using an antibacterial solution before communion. This should be done discretely and prudently. Also, ministers should refrain from distributing Holy Communion when they experience symptoms of the flu. Parishes need to be prepared for the possibility of unexpected absences of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- The Sign of Peace may take several forms including, but not limited to, the shaking of hands. Those who wish may refrain from shaking hands and offer a gesture or nod or word of friendship and peace at that point. All should understand and accept such a gesture as a genuine sign of peace.
- Individuals are free to elect to receive the Precious Blood from the Chalice at Masses where it is offered and they are equally free to decline. We will continue to offer the Chalice at Mass according to local custom. Those not feeling well certainly should refrain from receiving from the Cup as a sign of courtesy and concern for others. Pastors can make pastoral and practical decisions about the amount of wine set aside to be consecrated, the proper purification and cleansing of vessels, and whether on a given Sunday it might be necessary to refrain temporarily from offering the Cup during a particularly severe outbreak of the flu or the unavailability of Ministers of Holy Communion.

With regard to non-liturgical issues, we also note the following:

- Individuals engaged in apostolic activities, especially outreach to the infirm at home or in hospitals or nursing homes, should be attentive to hygiene and should refrain from these activities when they are not feeling well, especially since the homebound are more susceptible to illness. Again, consideration of good hygiene and proper respiratory etiquette applies. It might be wise to carry an antibacterial solution in the car for the cleansing of hands immediately before and after a visit. Individual hospitals and facilities will have their own guidelines and volunteers are urged to respect all such applicable guidelines.
- Schools and religious education programs should follow the practices and recommendations of the local boards of health and school districts.