

Archdiocese offers guidelines regarding Swine Flu outbreak

The Archbishop of Baltimore has issued some safeguards to help ensure that churches do not contribute to the spread of the Swine Flu. Below are listed some temporary, specific steps, which can be followed.

April 30, 2009

TO: Clergy, Religious, and Laity of the Archdiocese of Baltimore

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Late yesterday, it was announced that six probable cases of Swine Flu have been reported here in Maryland. All six are reportedly from counties within the geographic boundaries of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

As a result, we think it prudent to suggest some specific temporary steps that our local Church can take to help prevent the further spread of this illness:

- 1) In light of the ways in which the influenza virus is transmitted, consider offering Communion only under the form of the consecrated host and only in the hand.
- 2) Consider suspending personal contact during the sign of peace, the Our Father, and any prescribed greeting taking place before, during, or after Mass.
- 3) Make sure all ministers of Communion, ordinary and extraordinary, sanitize their hands before and after distributing Communion. Alcohol-based sanitizers should be made available.
- 4) Prior to this coming weekend's liturgies, consider appropriately disposing of holy water near church entrances and washing, drying and spraying with disinfectant the containers prior to refilling them.
- 5) Consider announcing the following at Mass: "If you have any symptoms of the flu

or severe cold, please remain at home. It is not sinful to miss Mass if you are sick and unable to attend; it is an act of charity.”

It is hoped that these safeguards will help to ensure that our churches do not contribute toward the spread of the Swine Flu and that these measures will only need to be in place for a short time.

Please join me in praying for all who have been impacted by this illness, especially our sisters and brothers in Mexico, as well as the many medical professionals providing care and assistance here in Maryland and throughout the world.

Because the situation continues to evolve there may be a need to strengthen these protocols or mandate additional measures. Your patience and vigilance are appreciated.

For more information about the Swine Flu, including questions and answers on influenza and the liturgy, as well as information from the Centers for Disease Control, www.archbalt.org.

In the Lord,

+Edwin F. O’Brien

Archbishop of Baltimore