

Archdiocese preaches common sense in dealing with H1N1 flu

In preparing for the H1N1 flu virus, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is asking the faithful to develop some new habits, such as a more precise distribution of Holy Communion and the liberal use of hand sanitizer.

The archdiocese is also asking that some refrain from maintaining a tried and true practice, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

"If they're sick, stay home," advised Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot, director of the Office of Worship.

"It's difficult, (missing) what should be the highlight of the week," he acknowledged. "Everyone should be trying to get to Mass as much as we can, but we have to recognize that this (H1N1) poses limitations. This really is a call to responsibility, and a call to honor your sisters and brothers."

That point is made repeatedly in the liturgical guidelines posted Oct. 1 on the archdiocesan website, one of which reads in part: "If you are sick or have an easily communicable disease you are not bound by the obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday. Stay at home and return to church when you are well."

The guidelines include several differences from the directions given during the spring 2009 wave of H1N1, as the archdiocese is no longer recommending that the Eucharist not be distributed in consecrated wine form.

"Last spring, we asked parishes not to distribute the precious blood to the entire community," said Anne Buening, pastoral associate to Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski in the Seton Vicariate. "Whether the precious blood is distributed to the entire congregation (now) is a decision that each parish makes.

"That decision needs to be tempered by what's happening in their community."

Buening added that all ministers of the Eucharist "now have specific guidelines on

how best to cleanse the chalice after each distribution,” which involve rotating both the chalice and the cloth used to clean it for the next communicant.

Underlining the point, Monsignor Jaskot reiterated the obvious, saying “Be aware that if you’re sick, please don’t receive from the cup.”

In regards to distributing the consecrated Host, the guidelines state that “there is no increased risk either to the minister or to the communicant in distributing either in the hand or on the tongue. At all times, though, you should carefully avoid direct contact between your fingers and the hand or tongue of the communicant.”

“What we found in talking to medical professionals,” Buening explained, “it’s the physical touch on the hand or tongue that’s the problem.”

Another area which holds potential to spread infection is the sign of peace, where the liturgical guidelines state: “ ... there is no single gesture required for this exchange. Some may prefer to shake hands, while others prefer to offer a simple bow.”

“In times like this,” Buening elaborated, “we’re asking that we refrain from shaking hands.”

The liturgical guidelines build on recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control.

“The CDC recommendation to wash or sanitize your hands often,” Buening said, “is based on the reality that you may encounter the flu virus on the handle of a grocery shopping cart, on the back of a church pew or on the door of the local post office.

“During this period of heightened flu prevalence,” she said, “we encourage parishes to look at these liturgical guidelines and make adjustments to liturgical practices as they see fit. If each of us does our part we can limit the spread of flu in our community.”

The liturgical guidelines can be found at <https://www.archbalt.org/safety/flu/liturgical-guidelines.cfm>.

LITURGICAL GUIDELINES

If you are sick or have an easily communicable disease you are not bound by the obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday.

At the time of the Sign of Peace during Mass, remember that there is no single gesture required for this exchange.

Those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue should tilt their head slightly back and extend their tongue. Those who wish to receive Communion in the hand should place one hand on top of the other and immediately consume the host.

Source: Archdiocese of Baltimore