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Statement of Bishop Joseph Latino on Swine Flu and the Liturgy

Many of us are aware of the outbreak of Swine Flu in Mexico and on a somewhat smaller scale in the United States. Some have expressed concerns over various actions in the Liturgy that might cause further spread of this strain of influenza.

In order to err on the side of caution, **I am recommending and asking all parishes to dispense from distributing Holy Communion from the cup to the congregation until further notice.** I also ask that, in order to protect our Communion ministers, **those parishioners who normally prefer to receive Holy Communion on the tongue to please receive in the hands until further notice.** I ask all pastors and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to be pastoral to those with physical challenges that may prevent them from receiving in the hands and to those with celiac disease who can only receive under the form of the Precious Blood. Special arrangements should be made to accommodate their receiving Holy Communion.

Also, the pertinent question of shaking hands at the Sign of Peace has arisen. Therefore, the faithful should be encouraged to share the Sign of Peace without touching hands or kissing until further notice. It should be pointed out that this remains an option for the individual as any form of personal greeting would be in daily society. As an option, the faithful should be instructed that within the Roman Rite, the Sign of Peace among the assembly can take the form of a simple greeting of those around them by the words: "Peace be with you," and the response: "And, also with you," without any shaking of hands.

I recommend that all pastors, lay ecclesial ministers, pastoral ministers and liturgical ministers 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 before Mass and after the distribution of Holy Communion 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.

Please see the attached information from the Center for Disease Control on how individuals can protect themselves from influenza. I am also attaching information from the USCCB Liturgy Secretariat that should also be helpful.

**Preventing the Flu:
Good Health Habits Can Help Stop Germs**

- 1. Avoid close contact.** *Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.*
- 2. Stay home when you are sick.** *If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.*
- 3. Cover your mouth and nose.** *Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.*
- 4. Clean your hands.** *Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.*
- 5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** *Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.*
- 6. Practice other good health habits.** *Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.*

Buenos hábitos de salud para la prevención

- 1. Evite el contacto cercano con otras personas.** *Evite acercarse a personas enfermas. Si se enferma, manténgase alejado de otras personas para protegerlas y evitar que ellas también se enfermen.*
- 2. Quédese en casa si está enfermo.** *Si es posible, quédese en casa y no vaya al trabajo, la escuela ni a lugares públicos si está enfermo. De esta manera, ayudará a evitar que otros se contagien de su enfermedad.*
- 3. Cúbrase la boca y la nariz.** *Cúbrase la boca y la nariz con un pañuelo cuando tosa o estornude. Esto puede evitar que quienes estén cerca de usted se enfermen.*
- 4. Límpiense las manos.** *Lavarse las manos a menudo le ayudará a protegerse contra los gérmenes.*
- 5. Trate de no tocarse los ojos, la nariz ni la boca.** *Con frecuencia, los gérmenes se propagan cuando una persona toca algo contaminado con esos gérmenes y luego se toca los ojos, la nariz o la boca.*
- 6. Tenga buenos hábitos de salud.** *Duerma lo suficiente, sea activo físicamente, controle el estrés, beba muchos líquidos y coma alimentos nutritivos.*



Ten Questions on Influenza/Swine Flu and the Liturgy

Throughout the years, the Committee on Divine Worship's Newsletter has addressed the liturgical implications of the transmission of pathogens on numerous occasions. With the swine flu virus appearing in the United States, the Secretariat of Divine Worship, having consulted with experts, offers the following brief reflections on "influenza/swine flu and the Liturgy."

1. What is swine flu influenza?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "swine influenza (swine flu) is a disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people."

2. Why is there particular concern for the spread of swine flu at this moment?

Numerous cases of swine flu were recently confirmed in the United States. The CDC is presently monitoring this health issue and will give further guidance as the situation warrants.

3. What is the best way to prevent the transmission of the swine flu virus?

The CDC suggests that, "as with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important and appropriate preventive practices is careful and frequent hand hygiene. Cleaning your hands often using either soap and water or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizers removes potentially infectious materials from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission."

4. How is the influenza virus transmitted?

According to the CDC, "influenza viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and spreads virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. When these viruses enter the nose, throat, or lungs of a person, they begin to multiply, causing symptoms of the flu."

5. Does transmission of the flu require direct contact between persons?

"The viruses can also be spread when a person touches a surface with flu viruses on it (for example, a door handle) and then touches his or her nose or mouth. A person who is sick with the flu can spread viruses – that means they are contagious. Adults may be contagious from one day before developing symptoms to up to seven days after getting sick. Children can be contagious for longer than seven days."

6. How can the spread of the influenza virus be prevented?

While the single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated, the CDC does not know if the seasonal flu vaccine will protect against the swine flu virus. The CDC recommends these other ways to prevent the flu: "Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too; stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness; cover your mouth and nose. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick; clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth."

7. In previous years, what has the Church done in localities where the outbreak of Influenza is most significant?

In those localities where the outbreak of the disease has been the most significant, bishops have introduced several liturgical adaptations in regard to such practices as the distribution of Holy Communion and the exchange of the Sign of Peace in order to limit the spread of contagion.

8. What measures should be taken in Roman Catholic liturgies in the United States of America now?

Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be especially reminded of the need to practice good hygiene. Ministers of Holy Communion should 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. They should instruct people who feel ill not to receive from the cup.

9. What about further adaptations or the restriction of options at Mass?

The Diocesan Bishop should always be consulted regarding any changes or restriction of options in the celebration of Roman Catholic Liturgy. However, the need for the introduction of widespread liturgical adaptations for the prevention of the transmission of influenza in the dioceses of the United States of America is not evident at this time.

10. What is the Secretariat of Divine Worship doing to address this question?

The Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and provide the best advice possible to Diocesan Bishops and their Offices for Worship. The Secretariat likewise appreciates whatever information Diocesan Offices for Worship are able to provide concerning local conditions and the pastoral responses developed by Diocesan Bishops. Continuously updated information is available from the CDC at www.CDC.gov/swineflu.

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