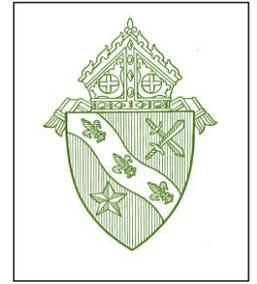


From the Office of Worship, Diocese of Dallas
October 2014



STATEMENT ON THE LITURGY & THE EBOLA VIRUS

As the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) takes careful and measured steps to inform the public regarding the Ebola virus, in Africa as well as the three known cases in Dallas, we are encouraged to be calm and conscientious in our own efforts to avoid unnecessary worry and unwarranted panic.

The CDC reminds us that, although “Ebola hemorrhagic fever is a rare and deadly disease caused by infection...” it is *spread by direct contact* with body fluids of an infected person, or objects contaminated with the virus, or infected animals (blood or fluids or infected meat).” Further, a person must actually be *sick and symptomatic* in order to spread the Ebola virus to others. Again, the CDC reminds us that Ebola is not spread through casual contact, air, water, or food grown or legally purchased in the U.S. (Source: www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html)

Due to widespread media coverage, the public also has knowledge of Enterovirus D68 activity, taking the form of a widespread outbreak of severe respiratory illness in children. One perspective on this outbreak is that every fall, according to the CDC, enteroviruses and rhinoviruses cause literally “millions of respiratory illnesses in children.” Often, the public is unaware of the CDC’s expectation: that EV-D68 infections will likely begin to decline by late fall (2014). Early awareness of, and treatment for symptoms seems the best hope of insuring a milder form of the virus.

Some pastors and parishes have expressed concern about serving the Precious Blood at Mass. Based on guidance that the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship provided in the past regarding widespread influenza H1N1, the question of serving the Precious Blood can be addressed in the following way:

- If the celebrant’s health is compromised due to impending sickness (symptoms of flu, or of being physically unwell), then the chalice should be restricted to the celebrant only. (If concelebrants attend, an additional chalice is appropriate. Wash both with soap and water after purification.)
- **There is no reason to withhold the Precious Blood for Holy Communion: it is the decision of each individual to receive the Precious Blood.** If Catholics suspect the onset of influenza or are simply not feeling healthy, then they should make the decision to refrain from receiving the cup. Receiving the Body of Christ

(consecrated host) is advised until the person feels well again. Pastors are encouraged to continue to offer Holy Communion in its “fuller form” (cf. GIRM, n. 281) since there is no clear evidence of any epidemic. Personal common sense regarding the sacramental species is the best course of action.

- **The faithful should be advised of their individual responsibility in taking the Precious Blood, which depends on their own personal health situation.** Additionally, there is no evidence at this time to discourage gluten-intolerant Catholics from continuing to receive the Precious Blood. Again, individual responsibility is the norm. (Pastors please note that so-called “gluten free” hosts are not valid matter for Holy Communion. Please contact the Office of Worship for several approved vendors of *low-gluten* hosts, and how to manage consecration.)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should practice good hand hygiene before leaving their seats to minister the Body of Christ and the Precious Blood. Rather than ritualize the act of hand-washing at the credence table (this is not part of the Catholic Mass), ministers should use a small alcohol-based hand rub after the Sign of Peace, and then move to perform their ministry. (Recall also that direct contact with *body fluids* promotes the spread of the Ebola virus; healthcare workers must be especially vigilant, it seems doubtful that those who distribute Holy Communion would have occasion for this type of contact.) **Sacristans and others who wash the vessels** (noting that the priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte must *purify the vessels* beforehand) should take care to use detergent and hot water to wash the vessels.

At the **Sign of Peace** the parish community shows their mutual charity just prior to receiving Holy Communion. In many parishes, this often involves physical contact such as hugging or shaking hands. Pastors *may* suggest a simpler gesture (a smile, a bow of the head) to accompany the words of peace which people exchange, *restricting this to the flu season only or until the Ebola virus has been reasonably addressed in the U.S.* Care must be taken, though, *to avoid creating a new rite* within the intended simplicity of this part of the Mass.

Holy water fonts and baptismal fonts containing blessed water do not pose a particular concern for transmittal of Ebola. The CDC reminds us that Ebola is not transmitted through water. As always, water should be kept as clean as possible. In small fonts, the appearance of cleanliness seems especially important. This blessed water is a sign of our baptism, as we cross ourselves with the sign of Christ.

Amid concern and continuing media focus on the Ebola virus, enterovirus, and influenza, **homilists** are presented with an opportunity to preach about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements (consecrated bread and wine), whole and entire—the doctrine of concomitance. It is also timely to demonstrate the preferred reverence that is due the Eucharist as people receive the Body and Blood of Christ (i.e. a simple head bow). The Office of Worship is available to respond to additional questions or concerns. We hope that this statement will assist pastors and parishes, and that liturgical implications regarding the Ebola virus and influenza will be kept in reasonable perspective.

Catholics are always encouraged to pray for those who are sick, and for their families and caregivers. Offering prayers for those who struggle with disease, whether in mind or body, is the preferable and most compassionate response that Catholics can provide in these times.