



STATEMENT ON THE LITURGY & WIDESPREAD INFLUENZA

Influenza activity continues to increase in the U.S., according to information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The state of Texas reports and the CDC has verified *widespread* cases of various types of influenza (H1N1 has returned this season).

According to the CDC, people with flu can spread it to others up to about 6 feet away, and experts think that flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets made “when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk...less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has a flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.” (Source: CDC website, www.cdc.gov/glu/about/disease/)

The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship has in the past provided guidance in response to pastors and persons who question the use of the cup in serving the Precious Blood at Mass. Based on such guidance, the Office of Worship therefore offers the following measures, and asks that the priests, deacons, and especially Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion be clearly advised and instructed. **The faithful should also be advised of their individual responsibility in taking the Precious Blood, depending on their own personal health situation.**

Pastors are encouraged to continue to offer Holy Communion in its “fuller form” (cf. GIRM, n. 281) of consecrated bread and wine, with the following advisory:

- If the celebrant’s health is compromised by impending flu, then the chalice should be restricted to the celebrant only, with an additional chalice for concelebrants, and washed with soap and water after careful purification.
- **It is the decision of each individual to receive the Precious Blood. Those who suspect symptoms that may signal impending flu should refrain from receiving the Precious Blood.** Receiving the Body of Christ (consecrated host) is advised until the person is well again.
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should practice good hand hygiene before leaving their seat to minister the Body of Christ and Precious Blood. Rather than *ritualize* the act of hand washing at the credence table or in the sanctuary (which is not part of the Catholic Mass), they could use (carry) a small alcohol-based hand rub after the Sign of Peace and then move to perform their ministry.
- Sacristans and others who *wash* the vessels after each Mass (noting that the priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte must *purify* beforehand) should take care to use soap and hot water to wash the vessels.
- The Sign of Peace signifies to the parish community their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before receiving Holy Communion. In many parishes, this rite often involves physical contact such as hugging or shaking hands. The pastor may suggest a

simpler gesture (smile, simple bow of the head) to accompany the words of peace which people exchange, *and restrict this only to the flu season.*

Care must be taken, though, to avoid creating a new rite within the *intended simplicity* of this part of the Mass. (Note: there is a pastoral, catechetical opportunity at this time to speak of the *structure* of the Mass [during the homily] found in Chapter II of the GIRM. This chapter provides a solid basis for teaching about parts of the Mass.)

Note also: homilists are presented with an opportunity to remind their congregations of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements, whole and entire—the doctrine of concomitance. Further, homilists may consider this as an opportunity to demonstrate the reverence that is due the Eucharist when receiving the Body of Christ and the Precious Blood. The *Norms for Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds* (Part II) are found in the 3rd edition of the Roman Missal, following the GIRM.

If there are additional questions or concerns, the Office of Worship is available to respond. We hope that liturgical implications regarding the flu will be minimal, and kept in reasonable perspective.

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