



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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### MEMO

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DATE: September 14, 2009  
TO: Priests, Deacons, and lay faithful  
FROM: The Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino,  
Bishop of Madison *+RM*  
RE: The reception of Holy Communion and other moments of possible contagion during the Eucharistic Liturgy in the context of this year's flu season

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1. According to liturgical law, in all cases, the individual priest-celebrant may determine whether or not reception of Holy Communion under both species is in order at each Mass over which he presides;
2. Our holy people should be reminded, clearly and explicitly, that reception under both species is never necessary to receive the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is present, individually under the sign of bread and under the sign of wine. Those with flu-like symptoms, or those who are concerned about contagion should freely refrain from reception of the chalice, remembering to bow in reverence if passing, but not receiving from the chalice. Where several chalices are offered, those not receiving should simply bow once when passing the first chalice en route back to their seat;
3. Our people are to be reminded to extend the tongue sufficiently when receiving the consecrated host on the tongue to assist the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister in avoiding contact between the tongue and the fingers;
4. The dipping of the consecrated host into the chalice by the one receiving communion is always forbidden by liturgical norms;
5. According to the liturgical norms, holding hands during the "Our Father" is an optional practice reserved for Masses for Children. We should take this opportunity to phase out this practice where it occurs during Masses for adults. At Mass, all are welcome, during the "Our Father," to join the priest as he extends his hands in the orans position;
6. Our people should be advised that shaking hands at the Greeting of Peace is not necessary. They may simply keep their hands folded in the prayer position and quietly say, "Peace be with you," to a few in their immediate vicinity. It should be presumed, during the flu season that a number of persons will prefer not to shake hands. The priest-celebrant, who shortly will distribute the sacred host, should take special care in this regard as he exchanges the Greeting of Peace;
7. Those who are ill with the flu (as with other possible serious illnesses) are dispensed from attendance at Masses of obligation during their period of illness;
8. If all take the proper precautions, it should not at all be necessary to miss Masses of obligation for fear of contagion.

## LITURGY & THE H1N1 (SWINE) FLU

Some questions have arisen regarding the concern over the outbreak of the flu and liturgical practice (sign of peace, distribution of Holy Communion, etc.). My suggestion is that people be reminded that:

1. Those who distribute Holy Communion should take care to clean hands prior to distribution of Communion. This should be done discretely, preferably outside of the sanctuary; they should find or request a substitute if they feel that they may be getting sick.
2. People may be reminded that if they are not feeling well or if their own immune system is suppressed that they should refrain from touching others during the sign of peace and refrain from receiving Holy Communion from the chalice. All should be encouraged to respect others if they choose to refrain from shaking hands during the sign of peace (they still can say the greeting of peace and smile!!!).
3. If a person is seriously ill they are not bound to participate in (attend) Sunday Mass.

The US Bishops have the following information on their website:

### Ten Questions on Influenza/Swine Flu and the Liturgy

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*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 H1N1 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](http://www.CDC.gov/swineflu).

**Flu Concerns:** Some people are concerned about the outbreak of the flu and some of our practices during Mass (sign of peace, distribution of communion, etc.). Our diocesan director of liturgy has suggested that (1) those who distribute Holy Communion take care to discretely clean their hands prior to distribution (a small bottle of hand sanitizer in a pocket or purse could be used), (2) if people are not feeling well or if their immune system is suppressed they should refrain from touching others and from receiving Holy Communion from the chalice, and (3) if a person is seriously ill, the person is not bound to attend Sunday Mass.