



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls
Office of the Bishop

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Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

PRECAUTIONS IN THE MIDST OF INFLUENZA INFECTIONS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recent reporting on the spread of the COVID-19 “Coronavirus” gives all of us pause and reason to be concerned about our own health and the health of those around us who are most vulnerable to contracting disease. Still recovering from a different strain of influenza, I know first-hand just how much we become impacted by viral infection. Therefore, it’s natural that many parishes and pastors have been approached with concerns about what precautions can and should be implemented, especially now that there are confirmed cases here in South Dakota. The coronavirus has already directly impacted one of our Catholic schools and parishes and is likely to affect others in the near future.

Let us first of all remain mindful that researchers have confirmed that the Coronavirus is spread in ways that more typical forms of influenza are spread. Therefore, as is usual for when influenza is locally prevalent in eastern South Dakota, some usual precautions which have been issued in the past are still applicable. I have listed these below.

Above all of these practical things, I ask all Catholics to pray for the protection of the infirm. Pray that our most senior brothers and sisters and any others who are vulnerable might be spared from this infection. Pray for the healthcare providers and civil servants who put their lives at risk to serve those who become ill. Prayer is a most essential component to our community response to this epidemic.

Within the liturgical Norms, pastors are afforded discretion to modify liturgical practices as seems prudent for the community. If modifications are deemed prudent and implemented in parishes, communication of the changes to all parishioners is essential.

General Principles

1. Pastors, in their prudent discretion and understanding of local concerns, have been given authority by the Church to determine appropriate adjustments to customary practices that are consistent with liturgical Norms.
2. According to the Church’s instruction, those who are ill with the flu or another illness are dispensed from attendance at Masses of obligation during their illness. Therefore, please stay home if you are feeling ill and/or are likely to be contagious.
3. If you are ill and therefore are dispensed from the obligation, you are encouraged on Sunday to view the Diocesan TV Mass and as able to spend time in prayer and reading Sacred Scripture at home.

4. Surfaces in the worship, gathering and education spaces at our parish facilities should be cleaned frequently. If custodial staffs are unable to complete these additional cleanings, this might be an opportunity for volunteers in the parishes to lend assistance.

Holy Communion

1. Individual priest-celebrants should determine whether to distribute Holy Communion under both species at each Mass over which he presides. As the body, blood, soul and divinity are fully present under both, priests are encouraged to suspend distribution of the Precious Blood at Holy Communion now that we know influenza infections are known to be present.
2. All ministers of Holy Communion, ordained and lay, should take special care to prepare appropriately for the distribution of the Blessed Sacrament. These preparations should include a thorough cleansing of their hands immediately prior to fulfilling this sacred role in the liturgy. Ministers should avoid making physical contact with Communicants when distributing.

Direct Contact between the Faithful Attending Mass

1. There is no liturgical directive that any or all in the assembly must hold hands during the Our Father. And so, the faithful should not be encouraged to hold hands. Rather, when there is known illness within the community, the faithful should instead be discouraged from holding hands during the Our Father.
2. Church Norms permit the priest celebrant to omit the Sign of Peace during the Mass. Pastors should make the decision as to whether or not this is prudent in their parish.
3. Mass attendees are reminded that the shaking of hands at the Sign of Peace is always optional. As we all strive to avoid physical contact in order avoid spreading viruses, please consider other expressions such as simply making eye contact or waving. In fact, all Mass attendees should presume during the flu season that many will prefer not to shake hands in their own efforts to avoid physical contact.
4. The use of holy water fonts in churches is an optional custom. Out of precaution, pastors may choose to remove the holy water during this season or when infection is known to be present. Should this change be made, the faithful are encouraged to use this as a penitential act as they go without this important sacramental offered by the Church.

Each of these are offered with the hope that the Sacred Liturgies in our diocese remain welcoming but are also sensitive to the health issues that are present in our midst.

Should public health officials direct that additional measures are warranted as a result of the spread of the Coronavirus, further direction will be provided by the Diocese. Until such time, let us pray for those who are afflicted with the flu or other seasonal illnesses, that adequate health care may be available for all in need.

May God grant us good health. Saint Luke, patron of physicians and healthcare providers, pray for us!

Gratefully, in Christ,



Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls