



DIocese OF SUPERIOR

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

TO: Pastors, Parish Life Coordinators and Parish Directors

FROM: Bishop Peter Christensen

DATE: September 25, 2009

RE: Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

In preparation for the forthcoming seasonal influenza and H1N1 flu, I have established a special committee entitled the "Pandemic Preparedness Response Committee" (PPRC). Paul Altmann, Paul Birch, Fr. Philip Heslin (Chairman) and Peggy Schoenfuss are the members. They have surveyed an abundance of literature about the nature of the flu and what you should do to minimize the depth and severity of the pandemic.

At this time, I urge you to adhere meticulously to the attached specific procedure "A" effective October 1, 2009. If the severity of the pandemic increases, I will ask you to implement additional procedures "B," "C," and "D" as called upon by necessity in this order. All these procedures will be posted on our diocesan website: www.catholicdos.org. Peggy Schoenfuss has already sent procedural information to the schools. Needless to say, I trust your pastoral prudence will prevail in the process of implementing these procedures.

If you notice that attendance at your church or school is decreasing by 20% or more, please notify your Dean who will forward this information to Fr. Heslin. If you detect an increase in the severity of the spread of the flu in your parish that warrants the implementation of procedures "B," "C," and "D" prior to my mandate to use them, please implement them immediately.

Much of this information about the specific procedures was derived from over 60 pages of policies prepared by the Diocese of Davenport. We are most grateful for their permission to use this extensive work.

www.flu.gov is also an excellent source of detailed information about the symptoms and nature of H1N1 and what you can do to prevent it and to minimize its spread. There is also a link to this website on our diocesan website. I hope you will take advantage of this valuable resource.

If you have any questions about this material, please contact Fr. Heslin at (715) 394-0206.

Once again, I am asking that only procedure "A" be implemented at this time. Let's pray that this flu is short-lived so we can soon resume our normal sacramental and social practices.

Thank you sincerely for your active endeavors to implement these procedures in your parishes.

Cautionary Levels Relating to Pandemic Influenza for use in the Diocese of Superior September 25, 2009

The liturgy stands at the center of our lives as Catholics. Certainly, in times of crisis, we would expect an increased turn to the Church's rites as people seek comfort, hope, and a sense of meaning in the midst of suffering. At the same time, it must be admitted that the very actions that are central to our identity may, in themselves, assist in spreading pandemic influenza. Gathering as a community, touch, and the sharing of common articles can all be instrumental in spreading the flu.

In this light, it is important to recall c. 223.2: "In view of the common good, ecclesiastical authority can direct the exercise of rights which are proper to the Christian faithful." In other words, individual rights can be subsumed to the common good in case of need. The adjustments in liturgical and pastoral practice called for in this document reflect the canon's call that all the faithful, in exercising their rights, must also "...take into account the common good of the Church, the rights of others, and their duties toward others." (c. 223.1).

- **Given the rapidity of change in a pandemic situation, there may be an uneven distribution of disease across the diocese.**
- **Pastors are asked to report drops in Mass or school attendance by 20% or more to their Dean. Deans will report these findings to Fr. Heslin.**
- **Depending on local situations, pastors and others in leadership roles may need to implement some of the guidelines which follow (in Levels "A", "B", "C", and "D") prior to them being mandated by Bishop. Those making these decisions should remain alert for changes in their local situations and be sure to heed any directives from their local Public Health authorities.**

Level "A"

At this point, events suggest the increased risk for a pandemic, prompting the need to review plans and preparations for such an emergency and increase our level of caution.

- Parishes are to have bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer available for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. For example, these may be placed in the front pews (or other discreet but convenient place) and should then be used by these ministers both on their way to the sanctuary before communion and then again after ministering communion.
- All sick individuals, including clergy, are to stay home. Signs are posted on church, and parish/school doors instructing those with fever or other flu-like symptoms not to enter.

- Faith formation programs should be aware that camps, retreats, and other large youth gatherings may need to be postponed or cancelled, depending on local conditions. Youth ministers and catechists should keep up to date with the latest advice from public health authorities concerning such gatherings.
- Increase frequency of sanitizing door handles and other commonly touched solid surfaces.
- The vessels containing the bread and wine are to remain covered until placed on the altar.
- If a parish uses a large vessel at the entrance(s) of the church from which individual parishioners move hosts to the paten/ciborium, such a practice needs to stop at this point.
- Communion from the Cup is suspended. Only the priest and deacon if present are to commune from the Chalice—and then from opposite sides of the rim.
- In distributing communion, the Host shall be placed in the communicant’s hand without the minister touching the communicant.
- Communion on the tongue is discontinued.
- The practice of touching a non-communicant for a blessing is also to be discontinued.

Level “B”

In addition to the steps found in level “A”, the following steps (and modifications) are now to be added if necessary:

- Set up hand-washing stations in all buildings: tissues, trash receptacles, hand sanitizer, including instructions (signage).
- Sharing of the Sign of Peace by handshake or hug is suspended; rather, a simple bow/nod to one another will be used.
- Holding hands during Lord’s Prayer or any other part of the Mass is suspended.
- Ministers (incl. clergy and ministers of hospitality) are asked not to shake hands when they greet parishioners.
- Priests, deacons, readers, and servers—since they will be touching items in common—are to sanitize their hands before and after Mass, and during Mass if their hands become contaminated.
- On Good Friday, the Cross will be venerated by bow or genuflection, not by touch or kissing.
- In those places where it is the practice to venerate icons with a touch or kiss, that practice, too will be replaced with a bow.
- As far as pastoral visits to the sick are concerned, ministers should practice meticulous hand washing and—if the parishioner has symptoms of the flu virus—consideration should be given to wearing masks and gloves.

- Holy water fonts/stoops are emptied and refilled after each liturgical celebration and at least once daily.

Level “C”

In addition to the steps found in levels “A” and “B”, the following steps (and modifications) are now added if necessary:

- Staff or volunteers are to clean door handles and other hard surfaces (such as pews, water fountains, desks, tables, countertops washrooms) with a disinfectant. They should wear masks, gloves, and goggles when doing so and when emptying trash receptacles.
- Disinfecting should be done in parishes and chapels after each Liturgy (at least daily).
- Empty all baptismal and holy water fonts, including those that allow for full immersion; parishes should have pre-filled bottles of holy water available.
- Large group meetings should be postponed if at all possible. If not, participants should be seated with at least a 3’ distance between individuals.
- Home prayer booklets and other resources will be made available in case large group gatherings are suspended by Public Health authorities.
- The person preparing wine and hosts for Mass is also to wear a mask and non-latex gloves.
- Collection baskets are not to be passed person-to-person. It is preferred that a collection basket or locked poor box be placed at the entrance(s) of the church; alternatively, baskets with handles may be used (in which case ushers are to wear gloves and immediately wash their hands after the collection).
- Because the influenza virus can remain viable on surfaces for some time, the money collected is to be quarantined for 3 days before being counted. Those removing money from the collection baskets or boxes are to wear gloves and wash their hands afterwards.
- The collection is not carried in procession as part of the preparation of the gifts and altar.
- Due to their ability to transfer infection from hand-to-hand, common missalettes and song books should not be used.
- Worship aids, if used, should be printed for each occasion and then destroyed. Reprint permission pertaining to applicable copyright laws is to be followed.
- To the extent possible, the assembly will be seated in alternating rows, thereby increasing distance between individuals. In addition, it may become necessary to limit the number of individuals present for any one Mass.
- Non-essential gatherings—such as Children’s Liturgy of the Word and post-Mass social gatherings /refreshments—are to be cancelled.

- Turn off water fountains or mark them as not to be used. Bottled water should be available in case of necessity.

Level “D”

In addition to the steps found in levels “A”, “B”, and “C”, the following steps are now added if necessary:

- If Public Health authorities mandate that all large-group gatherings be suspended, parishes will comply and stop offering the Mass and other sacraments to groups. If such were to occur, the Bishop dispenses from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass.
- If public celebration of the sacraments is suspended, signs to that effect will be posted at entrances to the church and parish offices.

We are most grateful to the Diocese of Davenport for their generosity in providing us with their document *Policies Relating to Planning for Pandemic Influenza*, upon which this document is based.