



# St. Joseph – St. Lawrence Parish

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## **SUBJECT: GUIDELINES FOR THE FLU SEASON AND THE SACRED LITURGY**

Dear Parishioners,

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, our primary concern is our attentive participation in the Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. However, in any public gathering of people, the sharing of germs and pathogens is inevitable. In the midst of this cold and flu season, each of us has the fraternal responsibility of taking precautions to prevent the spread of contagious illnesses. Frequent hand-washing, covering of the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, and regular habits for disease prevention, especially in high-risk areas, should be common practice.

As we face the possibility of a severe viral outbreak in our community, and with reports of the significant threat worldwide of the Corona virus, greater attention is required to keeping one another healthy. Some practical steps, along with common sense, are critical to achieving this.

**WHAT IS THE CONCERN?** Concerns have been raised over whether the sharing of the communion chalice during Holy Communion contributes to the spread of the flu and any other contagious disease. The Centers for Disease Control notes: "Most healthy adults may be able to infect other people beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five to seven days after becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer than seven days. Symptoms start one to four days after the virus enters the body. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Some people can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons may still spread the virus to others" (CDC, October 5, 2017). Those at higher risk of contracting the flu include children under the age of five, women who are pregnant, individuals age 65 and over, and anyone suffering from a compromised immune system (CDC, February 6, 2018).

**SHOULD YOU COME TO MASS?** The obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and other Holy Days of Obligation is the ordinary expectation for Roman Catholics (Canon 1247). However, extraordinary circumstances such as sickness or severe weather excuse the faithful from this obligation. If you suspect you have the flu, or are suffering from a serious cold or other contagious illness, please stay at home and do not risk spreading infection to others.

**HOLDING HANDS DURING THE LORD'S PRAYER.** Well-intentioned folks introduced this practice into parishes in the 1980s. Although holding hands can be a beautiful expression of people united in prayer, this gesture is neither envisioned nor encouraged by the Church as a proper liturgical action or gesture in any of her documents governing the Sacred Liturgy, and therefore, is neither called for nor required. It is most fitting to pray the "Our Father" with hands folded in prayer.

**THE SIGN OF PEACE.** Congregants should not take offence should others choose not to shake hands with their hands during the sign of peace. An appropriate gesture for those who are concerned about spreading the flu virus might be to simply clasp one's hands together and, simply say, "Peace be with you." It should be further noted that, while the greeting of peace exchanged between the priest and the congregation is required at Mass, the actual exchange of a sign of peace among the congregants at Mass is not (cf. Roman Missal, Order of Mass, 128; General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 154, 181). I have decided that we will discontinue shaking of hands until further notice due to health concerns at this time.

**RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION.** Roman Catholics believe that both the Body and the Blood of Christ are fully present in the Holy Eucharist under the forms of each of the consecrated species; whether one receives only the Host or only the Precious Blood, one receives the fullness of our Lord's sacramental presence. While the Church permits reception of both forms at Mass, as a fuller sign of sharing in the Lord's Supper, such a practice may not always be possible. Those feeling ill, or who suspect that they might have been exposed to a contagion, should refrain from receiving Holy Communion from the chalice, and receive only the Sacred Host. Likewise, extraordinary ministers feeling ill, or who suspect that they might have been exposed to a contagion, should refrain from distributing Holy Communion under either species. Please note that it is never permitted nor appropriate for a communicant to dip the Host into the chalice; additionally, such an illicit practice may still directly contaminate the chalice.

Finally, pastors are granted by liturgical law to exercise discretion in distributing Holy Communion from the chalice, and may, without need for episcopal oversight, suspend or discontinue administering Holy Communion under both forms, especially depending on the potential severity of an outbreak of contagious disease within the parish boundaries. I have decided that we will not be distributing Holy Communion under either form for the time being, and until further notice.

**HEEDING MEDICAL ADVICE.** Anyone having been told by a medical advisor that they are particularly susceptible to infection or to complications due to the flu or other communicable diseases should refrain from practices that might cause an illness, including the shaking of hands, the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue, the consuming of the Precious Blood from the Chalice, etc. All communicants aware of their being, or having been, ill should consider it their moral obligation to avoid these same practices, in order to prevent the spread of infectious and contagious disease.

I appreciate your understanding during this period of time. I feel that prevention is better than the cure. I hope and pray for the best of health for all of you. Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

Father Francis Bakyor, Pastor