



Office of the Archbishop
225 Cordova St. Anchorage, AK 99501
p:907.297.7755 f:907.279.3885
archdioceseofanchorage.org

March 6, 2020

Additional precautionary measures during Mass

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This winter, as in some other recent years, particularly strong strains of influenza have appeared here in the United States and in other countries. In addition, this year we face the threat of the especially serious coronavirus, the nature and effects of which have not yet been fully determined. In response to these health concerns, I am adding the following additional precautionary measures to the those that were published in early February.

- Suspension of the exchange of the sign of peace
- Suspension of holding hands during the Our Father (for those parishes that have the practice)
- Suspension of the distribution of Holy Communion via the chalice

The reception at Mass of the Lord's Precious Blood from the chalice is restricted to the priest and deacon only, and other members of the assembly will receive Holy Communion under the form of bread alone. Please remember that we receive both the Body and Blood of our Lord when we take Holy Communion under either of the species of bread or wine. In those communities in which it is known that a member of the assembly is unable to receive under the species of bread due to celiac disease and a low-gluten host is either unavailable or ineffective, that person may also receive from the chalice by special prior arrangement.

I also ask that those of our brothers and sisters who normally receive Holy Communion on the tongue please consider receiving in the hand during this time, although everyone remains free to receive in either way. This would also help reduce the risk of the spread of disease.

We all hope and pray that these health threats will pass soon, at which time the above precautionary measures will be lifted. Let us all remember to follow the precautions published in early February. This letter and the previously published precautions are available at the back of the church. They are also posted in the narthex and available on the Archdiocesan website at archdioceseofanchorage.org.

Let us pray for those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness that they might be healed, and for the repose of all who have died from this sickness in recent weeks.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M. *Am*

Flu Precautions:

With the flu season upon us, after consulting with the senior priests, local medical experts, and following the lead of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, it seems prudent to remind us all to take renewed precautions to minimize the risk of spreading disease. You are strongly encouraged to follow these practices effective immediately and inform your congregations about them to prevent the spread of the influenza/flu.

PASTORS AND PARISH DIRECTORS

- Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should use an alcohol-based hand gel just prior to distributing Holy Communion.
- Subject to their discretion, pastors may suspend the distribution of the cup at school Masses, i.e. communion under one species only.
- Following each Mass, after the vessels have been ritually purified, the sacristans should wash the vessels with hot, soapy water, then towel dry them and put them away.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations should be conveniently located at each entrance to the church.

PARISH COMMUNITY

- All should exercise prudence at pre-liturgical greetings, the Sign of Peace, and the Our Father. Please respect the will of others who may not wish to shake hands or make other forms of physical contact. For example, a respectful bow at the Sign of Peace is sufficient. The same holds for holding hands during the Lord's Prayer.
- Reception of the host on the hand is the best way to reduce the possibility of flu virus transmission.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood from a common cup is optional, subject to the discretion of the pastor.
- Intinction (dipping the host into the Precious Blood) is not an option.
- If you feel ill or have a family member who is ill within your household or if you have a compromised immune system you should refrain from receiving the precious blood from the common cup.
- While scientific evidence is inconclusive at this point, health professionals are recommending taking precautions when using holy water. Water from the fonts should not be ingested, nor should it enter the body via the eyes or nose. Holy water should be changed frequently.
- The Center for Disease Control reminds people to practice respiratory etiquette: cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough - into your sleeve NOT your hand. Wash hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing for at least 30 seconds. Avoid transmission of mucus or bodily fluids if you suspect you may be infected, refrain from shaking hands, refrain from sharing a communion cup, and above all, if you feel sick, do not come to places where you might infect others.
- If you are in any way ill or suspect that you might be experiencing any infectious disease, you are not obligated to attend Sunday Mass. The CDC recommends that people with influenza like symptoms remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100 F – 137.8 C), or signs of a fever without the use of fever reducing medications. Normally this occurs 3-5 days after initial symptoms. Stay at home until you feel healthy. Missing Mass due to illness is not sinful and is a prudent decision. The virtue of charity, which encourages us to care for our brothers and sisters, would demand that we do what is in our power to prevent others from becoming ill. This is specifically the case when others who might not have the flu but may be medically fragile are present. It is a sign of respect to refrain from attending Mass or, in fact, doing anything that might put others at risk if one is sick.

I urge all of us to continue our prayers for the speedy recovery of those suffering from this virus. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has more information on their website: www.usccb.org/liturgy.

Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M.
Apostolic Administrator