

Liturgy and the Flu

Adapted from an advisory by the Diocese of Austin includes some information from publications of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of San Jose.

<http://www.olqaustin.org/documents/LitFluEnglish.pdf> - Accessed 2/29/2020)

Here are some common-sense liturgical practices to help everyone stay healthy and to care for one another during flu season and throughout the year.

How is the influenza virus transmitted?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, influenza viruses are spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and spreads the virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. 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. Adults with the flu virus 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.

How can the spread of the influenza virus be prevented?

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get vaccinated each fall. It is also helpful to avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay home when you are sick.

If you are sick, take care of yourself.

We care for the Body of Christ by first taking care of our own body. If you are sick, do not worsen your illness by trying to get to church, and do not put others at risk of catching your illness. If your children are sick, keep them home from worship, religious education, or youth ministry meetings.

Don't cough or sneeze into your hands.

Use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, then throw it away. If you don't have a tissue handy, do what school children are taught to do: cough or sneeze into your elbow and avoid touching the area of fabric you coughed into.

Wash your hands often, especially if you are a greeter, usher, or Communion minister.

Soap, water, and a good scrubbing are the best defense against the cold and flu viruses. Scrub your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you are not near soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or disposable hand wipe. Keep a small bottle or packet in your bag or pocket.

Avoid shaking hands with others before, during, and after worship you are sick or have been in direct contact with someone who sick.

At the Sign of Peace, you can offer a smile or a wave or a simple bow of the head to those around you. If you have come in direct contact with someone who has been sneezing or coughing, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands until you can wash them. This is a good practice at any time since germs can spread when we touch our eyes, nose, or mouth. Respect should be given to individuals who refrain from sharing a handshake at the Sign of Peace. This is at the discretion of each individual person.

What if the pastor is sick?

If the pastor is sick, it's best that the pastor not preside at worship. However, if this is not possible and the pastor must preside while the pastor is sick, the duty of distributing Communion to the assembly should be handled by others.

Keep the baptismal font clean.

On a regular basis, water from the baptismal fonts should be disposed of appropriately, and the font should be washed, dried, and sanitized with disinfectant before being refilled.

Visiting the sick:

All those who visit nursing homes, hospitals, and private homes should wash their hands with soap and water before and after they make their rounds. Between patients they should use hand sanitizer.

Pray for the sick.

Especially during cold and flu season, remember to pray for those who are sick, for their caregivers, for those who have died because of sickness, and especially for those who suffer with no one to care for them.