



Praenotanda

From the Office of Divine Worship

Influenza and the Liturgy

Questions can be directed to the Department for Worship.

Every time the cold and flu season arrives, we hear public service announcements about how to limit the spread of disease through normal good hygienic practices. When the community gathers for Mass or other celebrations we come from the real world.

We are God's people and we take part in the heavenly liturgy, but we remain part of the human family in its earthly pilgrimage. We are vulnerable to the troubles that can befall people along the way, including illness and disease. Both for our own sake and out of care for others, it is helpful to recall some things we can do to foster our community's health and well being.

For all members of the congregation:

- Keep tissues or a clean handkerchief available for coughs, sneezes, or sniffles. Once used, put them in a pocket or purse (perhaps in a simple plastic sandwich bag) until you can properly dispose of them. Don't set them on the seat, the hymnal, etc.
- Sometimes school students are taught that when a sudden cough or sneeze comes upon them they should nestle their mouth and nose in their elbow rather than use their hands.
- Speaking of hands, be careful of them. Use common sense in keeping them clean and in avoiding contact with mouth or nose in the cold and flu season.

Note about the Sign of Peace: Remember that there is no single gesture required for this sign. Some may prefer to shake hands, to offer an embrace, to place a hand on another's shoulder, or to offer a simple bow. This is a time to express our peace in Jesus Christ before we share the communion of his Body and Blood. Be thoughtful as you share this sign, and be considerate of the sensitivities of others.

- Be mindful and reverent in receiving Communion (as the ministers should be in practicing the normal hygienic safeguards).
- If you are very sick or know that you have an easily communicable disease you are not bound by the obligation to participate in Mass on Sunday. Stay at home and return to church when you are well. (For longer illnesses, please contact the parish so that arrangements can be made to have someone visit you with Holy Communion.)

For all liturgical ministers (clergy, servers, ushers, readers, cantors, choir, Communion ministers):

- Be especially careful to follow the above practices. Be alert to even the appearance of unhygienic practices (without becoming compulsive). It sets a good example for others and shows that you are conscientious about your role on their behalf.

For all Priests, Deacons and extraordinary ministers of Communion:

Before Mass:

- After arrival at church and before the start of Mass, wash your hands well with an antibacterial soap and warm water. Dry them with a clean towel. (If your practice has you greeting people who are arriving at church, save this hand washing until you are finished and ready to take your place for Mass.) Some may prefer to use the antibacterial hand sanitizers that are available.

During Mass:

- Be exemplary in observing hygienic practices, especially in the use of your hands – graciously, of course, and without drawing attention.
- At the Sign of Peace, consider using a gesture that does not involve shaking many hands.
- Consider having a dispenser of hand-sanitizer available on a table in the sanctuary that ministers can clean their hands just prior to distributing communion

At Communion time:

- When folding your hands, don't raise them up to touch your face.
- As you yourself receive Communion be careful not to get saliva on your fingers.
- Do not wipe your mouth with the purificator.
- Never use the purificator as a handkerchief (for sneezing, perspiration, etc.)
- In distributing the sacred host, carefully avoid direct contact between your fingers and the hand or tongue of the communicant. (This may require some practice.)
- In Communion from the chalice, be sure to wipe both inside and outside of the rim after each communicant. (Use thumb and forefinger through the purificator to "press" against both sides.) Then turn the cup a bit for the next communicant. Also, remember to keep shifting the purificator so that you are not wiping with the same part of the cloth over and over again.

After Mass:

- After the ritual cleansing of the chalices, they should be carefully cleaned with anti-bacterial soap and warm water, then dried with clean towels (or fresh purificators). They should then be covered for use at the next Mass.