

October 26, 2009

TO: The Clergy and Congregations of West Texas

FROM: Bishops Lillibridge and Reed

RE: Sharing of the Common Cup during Flu Season

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are in the season when people are experiencing the flu in general and have a heightened concern and awareness about the H1N1 virus in particular (as well as other communicable diseases). We want to take this seriously without overreacting, and provide options for people who are concerned. Below are some thoughts as you make decisions in your local congregation on these matters. These have been adapted from the Diocese of Northern Indiana.

1. Communion in one kind is always acceptable. Catholic tradition says that when you receive in one kind, you receive the full benefit of the sacrament. It would be appropriate, therefore, to note in the bulletin (or by verbal announcement) that those who wish to receive in one kind may do so.
2. Intinction should be administered by the LEM or priest/deacon, and not by the communicant him/herself. In some parishes it's the custom for communicants to do their own dipping; but of course they have difficulty seeing the level of the wine, and that often leads to wet fingers. Since it's the skin which can be the prime carrier of virus, we want to avoid this. So people should be instructed to leave the host on the palm of their hands. The LEM or cleric will take the host, dip it, and place it on the communicant's tongue. It's much easier for the person administering communion to see the level of the wine and thus avoid wet fingers.
3. Those administering Communion should wash their hands thoroughly before the Eucharist. It is also a good idea for Communion ministers to do an additional washing after the Peace. In some churches, where the sacristy is adjacent to the sanctuary, Communion ministers can slip into the sacristy as the Peace is winding down. In other churches this simply isn't possible; the sacristy is too far removed. Hand sanitizers may be an appropriate alternative, particularly alcohol-based sanitizers.
4. Some churches are suggesting that people avoid skin to skin contact during the Peace.
5. Those who wish to drink from the chalice may of course continue to do so.

We trust that you will handle this appropriately to your local customs and needs.