



Archdiocese of Santa Fe
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STATEMENT

**Liturgical Practices During the
2020 Flu Season and the
Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019) Outbreak**
Archbishop John C. Wester

ALBUQUERQUE – Tuesday, March 3, 2020—IMMEDIATE RELEASE— Due to the severity of the flu season and the international outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019), the archdiocese will continue liturgical safety measures and restrictions issued on January 7, 2020. New Mexico is one of the states still listed by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as having **widespread flu outbreaks** and **high Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Activity**.

Below is a letter from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, adding important points regarding liturgical procedures designed to minimize the spread of viruses; followed by the original memo from the archdiocese and a memorandum from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) regarding fundamentals and precautionary measures that can be applied during the celebration of Mass.

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you know, on January 7, 2020, Father Glennon Jones notified all priests, deacons, religious, and laity of the flu restrictions in place throughout the Archdiocese of Santa Fe this year. Due to the ongoing prevalence of the flu in New Mexico and the current international outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), I wish to remind you that these restrictions remain in place and must be carefully observed for the well-being of all the faithful. I ask that pastors, principals and all archdiocesan leaders ensure that our people are constantly reminded of the importance of observing these critical health safeguards. As I travel throughout the archdiocese, I notice that there are still quite a few who are not abiding by these safety measures.

Attached to this letter are two memoranda to assist you in protecting our people. The first is a copy of Father Jones's January memo and the second is from the USCCB. I would like to add two important points:

1. Given the highly contagious nature of the flu and the coronavirus, communicants **MUST** receive Holy Communion in the hand and not on the tongue. I realize that there are some who prefer to receive Holy Communion on the tongue. However, during the flu season and given the possibility of being exposed to the coronavirus, **ALL** communicants are to receive Communion in the hand. What is important is that we receive our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion. How we receive, while very personal to the individual communicant, is not crucial. What is important is that we receive our Lord in Holy Communion. Receiving Communion in the hand is every bit as respectful as receiving on the tongue. There is nothing ontologically preferable to

receiving on the tongue. I ask that we keep in mind the importance of receiving Holy Communion and that we do not allow a secondary consideration to prevent us from this most special gift that the Lord has given to us. People are dying from the flu and from COVID-19. I believe that this consideration as well as our other temporary liturgical procedures are part of our respect for the dignity and value of human life.

2. Please communicate as much and as often as possible our archdiocesan flu procedures as well as fundamental hygienic tips to keep our people safe. Washing our hands often and not touching our faces are two fundamental practices that go a long way to helping us avoid the flu.

Thank you very much for your careful attention to this letter and its attachments. I ask that we also pray for those who have contracted the flu and for the well-being of our faithful in general. The USCCB memorandum contains helpful suggestions in this regard.

With every best wish for the good health of all our brothers and sisters and asking our Lord, the Divine Physician, to bless us during this critical time, I remain

Your brother in Christ,

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe



ARCHDIOCESE OF SANTA FE

The Catholic Center

January 7, 2020

To: Monsignors, Priests, Deacons, Religious Sisters, Parish Life Coordinators, and Catholic Center Staff

Due to the increasing severity of the influenza season, Archbishop Wester directs the following steps be taken in regards to the celebration of Mass:

- During the Sign of Peace, instead of shaking hands or hugging as is often practiced, please simply nod your head toward one another and avoid bodily contact.
- While some persons have the practice of holding hands during the Our Father, they are asked to refrain at this time. They may extend hands toward Heaven or fold their hands - folded hands being the liturgical norm.
- Holy Communion is not to be received under both species; rather, only the Consecrated Host is to be distributed. As you know, the Church and its Councils have always recognized that both the Lord's Body and Blood are present even in either species alone.
- The celebrant is to encourage reception of the Consecrated Host in the hand; this is actually the norm in the U.S. per the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM). This will limit contact with saliva and the potential the spread of the flu virus. Request that persons who insist on receiving the Eucharist on the tongue wait to the end of Holy Communion in order to be the final communicants, limiting possible virus transmission. This is requested as an act of charity toward their brothers and sisters in the congregation.
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should wash their hands just prior to distribution Holy Communion, and such is recommended also after distribution for their own protection. An anti-bacterial gel or hand wipes may be used.
- Please announce that those who are sick, sneezing or coughing are highly encouraged to stay home. Sunday television Masses are available in English and Spanish. Remind them that it is not sinful to miss Mass on Sundays due to illness.

Please remind all that the influenza virus is very virulent, causing deaths each year especially among the very young and the elderly. The archdiocese institutes these directives not to limit their expression of faith, but rather as a preventative against a widespread and potentially deadly disease. Thus we ask their cooperation in laying aside optional personal preferences for service and charity toward their neighbor.

These directives will be revoked when the situation improves.

By direction,
Very Reverend Glenn Jones
Vicar General



Committee on Divine Worship

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops
From: Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, Archbishop of Hartford Chairman, USCCB Committee on Divine Worship
Date: February 28, 2020
Re: Liturgical celebrations and public health concerns

Your Eminence / Your Excellency:

We all continue to monitor with concern the questions that are arising about the spread of the coronavirus. If and when it becomes necessary to take preventative steps with regard to the celebration of the liturgy in your local church, the following considerations are meant to be helpful, inasmuch as the Diocesan Bishop “must promote, regulate, and be vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese” (GIRM 387). You may recall that this office offered similar advice in 2009 in connection with the pandemic of the influenza virus (H1N1 or “swine flu”).

Fundamentals that always apply:

- urging priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins or even using an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion;
- assuring the faithful that if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness they are not obliged to attend Mass, and even that out of charity they ought not to attend.

Precautionary measures that could be applied:

- suspending the exchange of the sign of peace (or instructing that it be exchanged without physical contact);
- suspending the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful via the chalice.

In the event that the threat becomes dire, as it has in some places internationally, the Diocesan Bishop also has the authority to:

- grant a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass;
- suspend public celebrations of the liturgy, including Mass.

Finally, on a more positive note, among the Masses for Various Needs in the Roman Missal, the three Mass formularies provided under the heading 48. For Any Need are particularly appropriate in the face of a health threat to the general public. GIRM 374 states: “If any case of a graver need or of pastoral advantage should arise, at the direction of the Diocesan Bishop or with his permission, an appropriate Mass may be celebrated on any day except Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day), Ash Wednesday, and the days of Holy Week.”

For more information, please contact the Office of Worship at 505.831.8128 or the Office of the Vicar General at 505. 831.8158--END