



## Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria

*Office of the Bishop*

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October 7, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In response to the concern, expressed locally, regarding the spread of the H1N1 Virus, commonly referred to as the “Swine Flu”, the following temporary guidelines are suggested for parish Liturgies in the Diocese of Victoria:

*The Public Health Agency of Canada wishes to inform Canadians that viruses such as H1N1 are primarily spread through respiratory fluids, either by being in close proximity to an infected person who is coughing or sneezing or by physical contact with an infected person or even with inanimate objects that have the virus still present. A common means of infection is through touching one’s mouth with the hand following contact with an infected person. This is why the habit of hand washing is highly recommended if one is to reduce the chance of infection. Further information on the H1N1 virus is available on the Public Health Agency of Canada’s website.*

The following practices should be adhered to in the Diocese of Victoria so as to reduce the spread of the H1N1 Virus in our parish communities:

- 1) **Staying home:** The most effective line of defense is for an infected person to remain at home, rather than attend the Liturgy. Missing Mass in this instance is not a breaking of the Sunday obligation but rather an act of charity towards others. Please check the Public Health Agency of Canada’s website for a list of symptoms.
- 2) **Sign of Peace:** Although this is an important Liturgical gesture, physical contact for the Sign of Peace is not essential. A simple bow of acknowledgement to the person near you is recommended at this time.
- 3) **Receiving Holy Communion:** Reception of Holy Communion in the hand would greatly reduce the spread of the H1N1 Virus. It is recommended then, that communion be received in the hand and that during this period of danger of infection, the use of the Communion cup be temporarily discontinued.

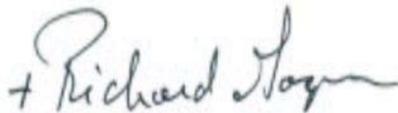
- 4) **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion:** It is most important that Extraordinary Ministers wash their hands both before and after Communion, this includes both the priests and deacons. In Nursing Homes, many residents receive Holy Communion on the tongue; Extraordinary Ministers then, must exercise particular caution relative to washing their hands at this time. Others, such as those who prepare the vessels for Holy Communion and Altar Servers need to practice extra vigilance regarding the washing of hands. *Note: the washing of hands should be with soap and hot water or with a hand sanitizer.*
  
- 5) **Holy Water Fonts at the entrance to Churches:** The use of Holy Water as we both enter and leave the church for Mass is a practice that reminds us of our Baptism. However, during this time of increased danger of infection, the priest's sprinkling of Holy Water either by going among the congregation or from the sanctuary, is another way to recall the sanctification of our Baptism.
  
- 6) **Greeters and Ushers:** Although hand shaking is an important gesture of welcome, physical contact is not essential. Again, a simple bow of acknowledgement is recommended.

According to the latest medical reports, it is anticipated that the H1N1 Virus will be with us this Fall season and into the New Year. In British Columbia, the H1N1 vaccine will be made available to all those who need and want this treatment before Christmas. Please consult the *Public Health Agency of Canada's* website for further details.

Thank you for taking steps to help avoid the spread of the H1N1 virus.

I remain,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Gagnon".

Most Reverend Richard Gagnon  
Bishop of Victoria