



*News from the*  
**Catholic Diocese of Palm Beach**

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Bishop Barbarito Issues Recommendations to Pastors and Laity in Wake of Influenza Epidemic

As the World Health Organization raised the influenza epidemic level from 4 to 5 on Wednesday, the Diocese of Palm Beach wants to address the obvious concerns people have when attending Mass in our Churches. At the present time, no national norms have been issued in this regard and the Diocese does not wish to raise unnecessary alarm. However, the Diocese feels it would be prudent to take preventative measures now. (Please see also the attached resource from the USCCB <http://usccb.org/liturgy/swineflu.shtml>)

The most frequent and obvious concerns are receiving the Precious Blood from a common cup, greeting people with a handshake or kiss at the Sign of Peace and holding hands while praying the Our Father. Until the current situation improves, Bishop Barbarito highly recommends suspending distribution of the Precious Blood at all Masses. Parishioners should be reminded that Christ is fully present in each species when the bread and wine have been consecrated into His Body and Blood. No one is ever under any obligation to receive both species and at this time, it is prudent to take this step.

At the Sign of Peace, parishioners should be encouraged to discontinue shaking hands or embracing. Simple eye contact, a smile and a bow of the head with the words “peace be with you” can give the same message as a handshake or kiss. As for the common practice of holding hands during the Our Father, people should be reminded that this is a local custom and not part of our liturgical guidelines. It is recommended that the practice be discontinued for the time being.

Along with these precautions, clergy and lay Eucharistic Ministers should take advantage of the waterless soaps available to wash their hands before and after distributing Communion to lessen the spreading of germs.

By taking all of these precautions as well as encouraging parishioners to stay home from Church when experiencing symptoms of cold and flu, we are doing all that we can under these circumstances to minimize the spreading of this influenza.

Let us join together in prayer that the current situation will not reach the stage of a pandemic and that God will protect us from serious harm.

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