



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Parish Infectious Disease Preparation and Response Guidelines for Swine Flu 2009-2010

September 2009

INTRODUCTION

Every parish needs to have thought through and planned for action in the event of a potential swine flu outbreak and to continue parish operations. That parish churches are open to the public presents both dangers and opportunities. The driving logic is that it is too late to plan and train when an infectious disease outbreak has begun. P⁵ – Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. Poor performance in a time of infectious disease outbreak means that the parish buildings might become the venues for spreading and contracting the infectious disease.

Summary: Continuing Parish Operations during a Community Health Crisis

While continuing to operate the congregational program activities and scheduled worship services, the Diocese publishes this guidance for parishes and parishioners concerning the presence at the church campus and other public gatherings, steps they can take to prevent spread of infectious disease, and other public health and safety guidance that may come from public officials and our Bishop.

Planning for continued worship and program activities involves a concern that visits to the church campus not become a venue for spreading of disease.

This planning document anticipates action in four areas of parish life: worship, personnel absence, pastoral care, and parish buildings.

If the Bishop issues directives that relate to public health and safety in the churches beyond this document, he would publish that information for parishes by electronic means and observe it throughout the Diocese.

CONDUCT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

There is much disagreement in statements by notable parties concerning the issue of the spread of disease through the administration and reception of the Holy Eucharist.

All entrances to the Church should be equipped with the means to dispense hand sanitizer for everybody who enters and again when they leave the Church.

Unless directed otherwise at a later date, the Bishop's policy will remain for the administration of the Eucharistic elements in both kinds and with a common cup. For individuals wishing to receive through intinction, the act of intinction should be accomplished by the person serving the common cup

and not by the receiving individual – the intention being to minimize the number of hands within the cup and to maximize the opportunity for the person administering the cup to clean using hand sanitizer.

The passing of the Peace is another opportunity for the spreading of infectious disease. The Diocese calls for clean hands and minimized body contact. The Peace could be passed merely by exchanging the phrases published in the Prayer Book.

The key to minimizing the impact of public gathering in the Church is the use of hand sanitizer products with their easy availability and instruction to parishioners to use them.

CLERGY PERSONNEL AND STAFFING ABSENCES

Individuals who may be sick with infectious diseases are called upon to be absent when sick – especially to include persons who lead worship. The clergy and lay Eucharistic ministers are as vulnerable to infectious illness as anybody; yet, the intention is to keep parish worship and program schedules operating as much as possible.

The Bishop calls on clergy in charge to conduct training for their other clergy, deacons, and lay ministers to conduct special training so that they can lead the Holy Eucharist service as an ante-communion as far as the Peace and dismiss the people in a simple way. This practice, rather than Morning Prayer, is recommended where the Morning Prayer service is no longer common and well known by the congregation.

The practice of leading the service without a priest would be used only in the extreme situation where there is no other way to keep the Church open on a Sunday. If worship is conducted in this fashion, it should be conducted in a very simple way and explained as a single-time exception to normal practice for the extremity of the current situation.

All parishes should prepare and keep the minimum of one whole week of consecrated Eucharistic elements on hand for such occasions.

OFF-SITE PASTORAL CARE

Clergy and licensed individuals bringing the Holy Eucharist to shut-ins and members under nursing or hospital care should follow the use of hand sanitizers both before arrive and at departure.

If the staff on location is wearing face masks, follow the onsite procedure.

The communion kit will require a thorough cleaning after every visit.

ON-SITE PARISH ACTIVITIES IN PARISH BUILDINGS

Parish hall buildings, classrooms, and offices are other venues where a wide variety of people pass through and can bring or contract infectious disease. Hand sanitizer dispensers at all entrances and their use both arriving and departing can minimize the risks for passing disease. All persons will need to be instructed to use them.

Sanitation in all food service areas is more important than ever. Rest rooms need careful cleaning. Outside groups meeting in parish facilities need to be informed and trained.

If large-scale immunization programs for the local community are needed, this is an outstanding opportunity to acquaint local residents with the parish. It is encouraged to make facilities available to public health agencies as venues for immunization. The Church Insurance representative for this diocese calls upon parishes to protect themselves against liability risks by receiving a copy of the immunization agency's insurance policy and keeping it on file.

OTHER ISSUES – Areas for planning and preparation include the following:

Organizational Preparations and Planning

- Every Parish needs to have agreed within the leadership about how to handle an infectious disease outbreak in the 2009-2010 school year. Membership should include the Rector, Wardens, Sexton, individuals with special knowledge and expertise about public health, representatives of organizations that contract to use parish facilities, and parish staff members.
- The Vestry enacts the Plan to become the policy of the Parish.
- The Bishop holds authority to invoke policies and procedures diocesan-wide, and the Rector holds the authority to activate the Plan, and designated first and second alternate persons need to be identified in case of the absence of the Rector.

Congregational Safety and Monitoring

- Parish membership and participant rosters need to be kept current and accurate.
- A simple reporting system needs to be created for members to report their condition, location, and safety if an infectious outbreak occurs.
- A separate roster of members with specialized talents and skills needs to be created. – to include individuals with health care skills.

Supply Availability

- The most commonly needed supply during an infectious disease outbreak will be hand sanitizer products, and it is wise to prepare by stocking an adequate supply for three months of use by everybody using the church facilities. Such hand sanitizer products could become scarce in the stores during an outbreak.

Plant and Property

- Study current traffic patterns in the parish buildings and plan for locations and dispensers of hand sanitizers at all entrances with a plentiful supply at the busiest entrances. Among important locations are kitchens, the Sacristy, and the Altar.

Parish Communication Issues

All parishioners should hold a telephone number where to report their illness and should know to originate such a report. Wise planning includes an arranged alternate number out of the area to receive and tally the information if the Parish Office remains closed due illness of the clergy or office staff.

Change the recording on the voice mail service to direct parishioners where to call to report their situation during an infectious outbreak. Voice Mail will be more able to sustain a volume of messages than desktop answering machines with the added benefit of being more easily checked remotely..

Parish websites and email addresses will generally remain active and they can be viewed from anywhere. Keep the information current. Place a notice in the website immediately for any changes of the parish schedule

Consider how to harden and improve your wireless communications with the parish.

PROTECTION CHECKLISTS

Churches and Chapels

- ___ Place supplies and dispensers of hand sanitizer products at all entries to the Church.
- ___ Instruct the congregation to use the hand sanitizers for the duration of the outbreak.
- ___ Instruct the congregation about changes concerning worship and Holy Eucharist practices.

Kitchens and Parish Halls

- ___ Place supplies of hand sanitizer and soaps throughout food service areas with instructions about using them often.
- ___ Instruct all who handle foods to wear sanitary gloves.

Sacristy

- ___ Altar Guild should use hand sanitizers liberally when handling any materials related to Holy Eucharist. All hardware involved with the Holy Eucharist should be washed in the hottest water and stored away from activity when not in use.
- ___ Keep a minimum of one whole week of consecrated Eucharistic elements in reserve.

Church Office

- ___ Hand sanitizer dispensers should be used by everybody entering and then leaving the Parish Office.

GENERAL PLANNING BEST PRACTICES

APPENDIX 1: Diocesan Staff Cellular Telephone Numbers:

Bishop Dabney Smith	941-504-3200
Canon Michael Durning	941-993-3101
Jim De La, Communications Officer	941-586-3661
Diocesan website:	www.episcopalswfl.org

The Diocesan Office telephone number is 941-556-0315.