

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON—OFFICE OF WORSHIP

Some members of the faithful throughout the Diocese of Scranton are concerned with a possible outbreak of the flu virus. Many have questioned whether practices during the Mass itself may contribute to the spread of the flu virus, most particularly, the extension of the sign of peace, and the partaking of the Precious Blood from a communal chalice at Holy Communion.

While the Center for Disease Control affirms that the flu virus is transmitted when contact is made with a surface with the flu virus on it (e.g., the hand of a person infected with the virus), Catholics should be reminded that during the Mass, such contact may be avoided. The practice of offering the sign of peace through a hand shake is not an obligatory action of the Mass. Each priest celebrant may or may not extend this invitation to the assembly during the Eucharistic sacrifice, and each member of the assembly may or may not accept this invitation. Should the priest extend the invitation to the assembly to offer the sign of peace to one another, no person must feel obliged to shake hands with another member of the congregation. If one wishes to offer the sign of peace to another but feels that physical contact could place him or her at risk of illness, that person may simply extend a sign of peace without using the hands; for instance, saying quietly to the other, "peace be with you."

Some fear that sharing the Precious Blood from the chalice also puts the communicant at risk of becoming infected with the flu virus. The faithful are reminded that Holy Communion, whether under the species of bread or under the species of wine, is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, when one receives only the host, or when one receives only from the chalice, one receives the whole Christ. Any member of the assembly who feels ill at ease with partaking of the Precious Blood from the communal chalice when it is offered at Mass should know that to refrain from this option does not in any way decrease the sacramental effects or communal nature of the Eucharist.