

H1N1 PANDEMIC PLAN FOR CATHOLIC CHURCHES IMPLEMENTED

(St. John's, NL – October 28, 2009) In a letter to be circulated in all Roman Catholic parishes and to be read in all Catholic churches Archbishop Martin Currie, Archbishop of St. John's is asking that the Archdiocesan Pandemic Plan be implemented.

Archbishop Currie said “Based on the latest information from our parishes and local health units all parishes must implement our pandemic plan effective at all masses beginning the weekend October 31 – November 1.”

The Archbishop said that the Archdiocese of St. John's has been monitoring the H1N1 Virus situation very closely.

Parishes are to immediately implement six basic steps. These include:

Removal of holy water at the entrance of the church. There is a tradition in the Roman Catholic Church upon entering a church – parishioners place their hand in holy water font and bless themselves. This ritual blessing will be replaced by the rite of sprinkling of holy water at the beginning of the celebration of the Mass.

There is a tradition in most parishes that communion is distributed in two forms, communion (host) and the drinking of the wine from a chalice. In the future wine will not be distributed.

For some Catholics the preferred way to receive Holy Communion (host) has been on the tongue. In the future there will be no communion on the tongue. The priest will place the communion (host) in the hand of the parishioner.

Another liturgical practice that will change will be the greeting or “sign of the peace. During the celebration of the mass parishioners acknowledge each other by shaking the hand of those next to them as a sign of peace. In the future at the “sign of peace” parishioners are encouraged to acknowledge each other but without shaking hands.

Parishes have also been informed to make hand sanitizers available at the entrances to all of the churches and to encourage parishioners to stay at home if they exhibit flu – like symptoms.

The last pandemic plan to be drawn up by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's was in October 1918 in response to the Spanish Influenza Epidemic. As part of that response all churches were closed as were all schools and public assemblies.

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