

March 15, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

As you know, this flu season has been especially rough. Eastern Hancock schools were out a couple days last week and our school was out earlier in this year because of the flu. With the COVID-19 virus coming to Indiana, it seems prudent to take some steps to help reduce the spread of these nasty illness.

Beginning immediately, we will not offer common chalices at our weekday or weekend Masses. This means that we will only offer Communion via the host. We have low gluten hosts available for those who need them. If you need these low gluten hosts, but do not know how to receive one, please come the sacristy at least 10 minutes before Mass to find out the procedure. As Catholics, we believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but we have never held this to be literal. We believe that Christ is truly present body, blood, soul, and divinity in both the precious blood and body at Communion. In other words, we receive Christ completely in the host, chalice, or both. Just as the accidents of the bread and wine remain, like their taste and appearance, we also believe that other accidents remain as well. That is why we have rules that guide us when a host goes bad or precious blood has something in it that we can't drink. For almost 1500 years, the Church celebrated Mass without a common chalice, so suppressing the chalice temporarily does not lessen our belief in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

For those of you who serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, please note that we will not need as many ministers at each Mass. In fact, during daily Mass we will not need any additional ministers. During Mass that also has the school joining us, we will only need one other minister, and on weekend Masses we will need three other ministers to assist with Communion.

There are two other instances during Mass that can put people at risk for illness. The first is holding hands during the Our Father. This, of course, is not something that is required or even stated in our rubrics for Mass. I obviously cannot keep you from doing this. Families can certainly keep holding hands if they like, but you should not expect this from your neighbors at Mass. Do not be offended if they do not hold your hands. It's not required, nor will it ever be. The second instance is the Sign of Peace. Again, this is an optional part of the Mass but one that is universally taken. We will continue to offer this option at our Masses, but perhaps a simple wave, smile, or nod of the head will be sufficient in lieu of a handshake. I know this is a hard habit to break, so again, don't be offended if people don't shake your hand if it is extended.

Communion can be received in one of two ways: by receiving Communion on the hand or by mouth. Both are valid and both will continue to be used. If you are receiving on the hand, please be sure to do so reverently by placing your dominate hand flat under your other hand, which should be flat so to allow the host to be placed easily in the palm of your hand. The only exception to this practice would be if the person receiving has an arthritic hand and cannot lay their hand flat. If you are receiving by mouth, be sure to slightly extend your tongue to give the minister an ample target. Please do not move while they are placing the host in your mouth.

I know that all the news can certainly make us nervous about our health and well being during these times. I certainly do not want to overreach, but I would prefer to err on the side of caution. I hope that you will join me in praying for all those affected by these illnesses this year, especially those who are hit hard by these ailments because their preexisting health struggles. As the year moves forward, we will reevaluate these measures. We will most likely make an exception for First Communion, but I foresee the changes lasting through the end of this school year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Jenkins", is written on a white rectangular background.

Fr. Aaron Jenkins