

Swine Flu & The Church

24 July 2009

We have received further guidance and advice about the swine flu pandemic both from the Bishops' Conference and NHS.

The diocese has today (24 July) been given advice by Dr Julia Verne Deputy Regional Director of Public Health with whom we have been in regular contact.

Bishop Declan said: "As I have said before it is our responsibility to listen to the advice being given by the NHS and the Bishops' Conference. It is important that in the communities of which we are part, we should help prevent the spread of influenza as far as possible.

"It is now sensible for all churches in our diocese to offer communion under one form, and in the hand. This has already been happening in some of our parishes. It may be helpful to remind some people that according to the teaching of the Church when we receive the consecrated Host we are receiving sacramentally the gift of the Lord, whole and entire, body, blood, soul and divinity.

"We are reminded, for the sake of hygiene, and to help prevent the spread of influenza, clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should wash their hands before and after Mass.

"The Sign of Peace at this time should be given by a smile, a slight bow or some other appropriate gesture, but not by the shaking of hands.

"This practice should remain in place until further notice. It is hoped that the reasons for this temporary change will be understood and appreciated. They have been made out of particular pastoral concern for the vulnerable, namely, the elderly, children and those with underlying health problems.

"In addition we can play an important role during the pandemic by making ourselves aware of NHS advice, particularly with regard to 'flu friends'. Our strong parish communities are renowned for their caring nature and I am sure this element of parish life will come even further to the fore. Please also make extra efforts to be in contact with elderly people and those living alone.

"Please pray for people working in the health service during the pandemic. Many healthcare professionals are working extended hours and may be away from their families."

cliftondiocese.com