

Be Not Afraid...

Holy Scripture is filled with many instances of Jesus telling us “be not afraid”. This calming influence can perhaps give us pause to reflect upon the current situation of both the early onset and wide outbreak of influenza cases across the country. Instead of reacting in fear, why not seek to be proactive and use preventative techniques to reduce the risk of disease?

The Center for Disease Control website states “Influenza (the flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year.”

We all know that Jesus certainly approached his life with wholeness. He sought balance – resting when he was tired and looking for solitude when needed. If he were amongst us today, would he approach this situation with balance? Would he not seek wise advice and use prevention as a first line of defense?

Prevention of the spread of disease such as the flu must have a role in our places of worship. Depending upon your faith practices, certain issues may be of concern to you when thinking about prevention. For example, in most Catholic faith communities there are concerns about receiving communion at Mass, especially when a communal cup is used. The heart of the Roman Catholic Eucharist celebration is sharing the Body and Blood of Christ, an important and centuries old symbol of unity. What steps can we put in place then for prevention of disease transmission?

As Ministers of Health we need to be mindful of educating our faith community members on adapting these practices during flu season. A number of years ago in my church our Health Ministries team raised these very issues during flu season and created the following ideas which were shared with parishioners:

- To begin with, we were bold and simply told people to stay home if they were ill to help contain the spread of the disease!
- Communion ministers were instructed to wash their hands before coming to church and/or wiping their hands with an alcohol based antibacterial solution prior to serving in this capacity
- Cup ministers were reminded to both diligently wipe and rotate the communal cup with each use.
- Rather than discontinuing the practice of a common cup, congregants were instructed to use good common sense and refrain from receiving the Blood of Christ if they were ill.
- We gently reminded everyone that not all who cough, sneeze or blow their nose are ill – some may just have allergies.
- When it came to extending the sign of peace to others we asked those who were not feeling well or even concerned about catching something, to simply nod their head, smile and extend a verbal greeting, or touch the person on the arm instead. We asked them to be mindful if someone greeted them in this manner to understand they were not being rude, but rather looking out for the welfare of others!

We were pleased when our members responded positively to our ideas, so we also posted the tip sheet (below) in our bulletins for people to review. Others on your team are likely to have good ideas as well to implement in your faith community. The bottom line is good health is important to everyone. Take the time to teach others to protect it by using preventative techniques and above all “*Be Not Afraid*”!

For more information, visit the Center for Disease Control Website at www.cdc.gov/flu.

Sharon Becker RN, Coordinator Health Ministries Program, Good Samaritan Hospital and Health Ministry Commission Chair, Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Dayton, OH.

Strategies to stop the spread of germs to help protect you and others from getting sick with the flu bug:

- **Wash your hands.** Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water is the first line of defense. Alcohol-based gels and wipes also work well.
- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **Stay home** from work, school, errands and worship services when ill. This reduces the spread of disease and preserves your energy to get well.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** by using a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away as soon as it has been used.
- **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose or mouth as germs spread easily from your hands into the body through these passageways.
- **Don't share utensils.**
- **Reduce the spread of germs** by using your dishwasher if you have one.

Other good habits will also help you stay healthy and boost your immune system in the winter and all year:

- Get plenty of sleep
- Eat a nutritious diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- Drink plenty of water each day
- Engage in regular physical activity
- Manage your stress.

Remember ~ Influenza is a serious disease of the lungs that can make you sick for a week or more with coughing, fever and body aches. Should you feel ill, seek medical care early, especially if you are in a high-risk group such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions.