

THE DIOCESE OF CHICAGO

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Office of the Bishop

April 30, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I hear media reports about the spread of the swine flu virus, several concerns occupy my mind and heart. First and foremost, I pray, and ask your prayers, for all who are suffering. Second, I am struck by just how global public health has become in our shrinking world. Third, I am thankful to God for the gift of science which has brought us the ability to identify and respond to such crises with far more skill and effectiveness than ever before.

An average of 36,000 Americans die from influenza related illness each year. This means that, regardless of the relative strength of the swine flu virus (and we pray that it remains weak, as it now appears to be), we need to be calmly attentive to our own health and the health of our communities. Given that all influenza viruses achieve global transmission so easily in our shrinking world, responsible behavior becomes an ethical mandate as well as good stewardship of our bodies and lives. Medical science teaches us important basic behaviors which we all know.

- 1) Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Get plenty of sleep.
- 2) Stay home if you are sick.
- 3) Cough into your sleeve or elbow and sneeze into a tissue or napkin.
- 4) Wash your hands with plenty of warm water and soap for at least 30 seconds. That's as long as it takes to say the Lord's Prayer at a steady pace, which it would be good for us to be saying more often at this time.

In addition to these sound personal practices, there is much that our congregations can do. I hope that each congregation will, at the very least, include the people of Mexico and all who suffer from influenza viruses in the Prayers of the People. In addition, I hope that all of us will be thoughtful about the language we use when discussing people who are sick and suffering. It is important that we have people's permission before we put their personal names on public prayer lists. It is also important that we do not reduce people's identity to their suffering. For example, we should not say "the sick," but, "those who are sick." Also, I commend the use of *Enriching Our Worship 2* for public services of healing and for pastoral visitations to those who are sick,



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homebound, or hospitalized. I have included two prayers from that book which some may find especially helpful.

Lastly, visit the Congregational Resources section on our website for additional resources on responding to flu outbreak.

<http://www.episcopalchicago.org/congregation-resources/Resources.cfm>

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeffrey D. Lee
Bishop of Chicago

Spirit of all healing, visit me, your child; in your power, renew health within me and raise me up in joy, according to your loving-kindness, for which I give thanks and praise; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Enriching Our Worship 2, p. 73.

In the midst of illness, God, I pause to give you thanks: for the glory of creation, which reveals in many forms your matchless beauty; for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus our Savior; for the gift of my life and the presence of the Holy Spirit; for loved ones who care for me; and for the companionship of the Church. I thank you, blessed Trinity, holy God, for the gifts which sustain me in my time of need. Amen.

Enriching Our Worship 2, p. 76.