

To: Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
From: Father LaMorte
Re: Swine Flu Virus

Due to concerns about the swine flu virus, some people have asked about possible changes in two parts of the Mass where they think people might transmit germs to one another: the exchange of the sign of peace and the offering of the Precious Blood of Jesus in the form of wine. In addition to the medical advice generally available, the following is offered for your consideration.

1. The prime method to avoid spread of the flu virus is the thorough and proper washing of hands. There is available in the vesting room at the rear of the church and on the table near the tabernacle a dispenser of hand sanitizer for your use just prior to Mass (for the sake of the congregation) and following the distribution of Holy Communion (for your own sake.)
2. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are asked to make efforts to distribute communion without direct physical contact of hand or tongue; and not to offer their services if they suspect they are carrying the virus.
3. Please remember that the exchange of the sign of peace among the congregation is clearly optional. If you must avoid direct physical contact of the hands because of the fear of the spread of the influenza virus, please do so. Let us all understand now that someone's verbal greeting ("The peace of the Lord be with you") with a smile and wave but no handshake, is not being unfriendly, but more likely shows care and consideration about possibly transmitting illness - or receiving it. Those around you will understand if you put your hands in your pocket.
4. Participating in communion with the cup is always to be a personal choice and never a requirement since we receive Jesus, whole and entire, under either form of bread or wine. Holy Communion from the chalice has been in optional use for thirty years, with no ill effects that we know of, and many communicants do receive from the chalice. In my experience and from all I have read, this holy practice is evidently quite safe for those who choose it because the alcohol in the wine acts as an antiseptic; the cleaning of the rim and the turning of the chalice are sufficient.

I hope this helps the good people who are seriously concerned about this matter. There are so many ways we are exposed to sickness that I would not want to worry excessively about these two good practices of our Mass. Just think of all the people you greet each Sunday, or that priests shake hands with at the end of Mass! So barring a major episode of sicknesses, I would hesitate curtailing either of these excellent expressions of our holy communion with Jesus Christ and with one another. For further information on this subject, please consult the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops website: www.usccb.org/liturgy/swineflu.shtml and read "TEN QUESTIONS ON INFLUENZA/SWINE FLU AND THE LITURGY".

Dear Friends,

As you may have read in the Sunday bulletin, after months of study, research, and consultation, we have a brand new Pastoral Planning and Advisory Board to replace the Parish Pastoral Council which we have been using here for many years. This new structure is smaller in number, more efficient and more responsive to me as the pastor and to the continuing needs of our parish community. The basic structure divides the parish into four distinctive ministries:

- Administration & Operations, led by John Kenny
- Spiritual Life, led by Chriss Hollar
- Social Activities, led by Jeff Walraven
- Christian Service to the Community, led by Jim Clark

This new planning board is composed of the executive committee (Jon Vincitore, Kim Bourbeau and Margaret Castelli) and four ministry delegates for each of these operating areas. Their charge is to foster communication with each of the key people and organizational leaders that make things happen at Holy Trinity and allow our parish to thrive. All operational aspects and working committees will now have a representative on the planning board. We hope to create a working dialogue between you and myself through the appropriate ministry delegate. With this structure in place, we expect to better address our parish needs in a collaborative fashion, and to be able to facilitate the decision making processes as we guide Holy Trinity Parish into the future.

Very soon, one of the new delegates will be contacting you to make an introduction and to explain how the new process will work. Thank you for receiving him or her, and for participating in this exciting new endeavor.

Father LaMorte

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Spiritual calling is lifetime job

Cleric numbers are on decline

By **Tendai Musakwa**

For the Poughkeepsie Journal

October 16, 2007

How would you feel about sharing in the celebration of the happiest moments in people's lives and giving them a shoulder to cry on during their saddest ones, on a daily basis?

These are some of the duties the Rev. Joseph LaMorte performs every day as pastor of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic parish in the Town of Poughkeepsie.

LaMorte and fellow clergy members play an often powerful role in society, providing spiritual and moral guidance to the people of their denominations.

María José Mendez, a Poughkeepsie resident who has been Catholic for 18 years, said, "Priests are inspired by the Lord to help people understand life better."

In a 2006 Gallup Poll, 57 percent of Americans said religion was very important in their lives, 40 percent said religion is increasing its influence on American life and 60 percent believe religion can answer all or most of today's problems.

The far-reaching influence of religion can also be seen by the sheer number of clergy in our society. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, New York state has an estimated 7,570 clergy, the largest number in the country, and makes up .090 percent of state employment.

The bureau defines clergy as workers who conduct religious worship and perform other spiritual functions associated with beliefs and practices of religious faith or denomination as well as provide spiritual and moral guidance and assistance to members.

Men and women "of the cloth" have many responsibilities.

From conducting worship, wedding and funeral services to counseling church members and visiting the sick, they have full schedules that take up most of their days.

LaMorte wakes up at 5:30 in the morning, spends time in private prayer, then celebrates daily Mass at 6:45 a.m., after which he begins a fairly unstructured and indefinite agenda that includes preparing homilies, visiting the sick at local hospitals and checking in with the head of Holy Trinity School, his parish's school, which LaMorte administrates.

Attention to body and soul

In between appointments and walk-ins from parishioners, LaMorte fits in an hour of exercise each day, usually a 5-mile jog.

With such a busy schedule, he usually doesn't get to sleep until around 11.30 p.m.

He does not complain, though, stating instead that he enjoys a "good fulfilling day."

Most members of the clergy go through some form of training, unique to each denomination, that teaches them to balance their busy work schedules and minister effectively to church members.

According to a Roman Catholic Web site, <http://catholic.org>, a priest has to go through five to 13 years of training.

LaMorte said prospective priests usually present themselves to seminaries after college. At the seminary, they spend four years learning theology, canon law, church history and preaching, among other things.

After graduation, the candidate for priesthood is ordained by a bishop, the only Catholic official who can consecrate priests.

While there are many differences between clerical and "normal" 9-to-5 jobs, the most fundamental, according to LaMorte, is the motivation for the job.

Priests believe they receive a divine call to a life in God's service, LaMorte said. They therefore remain priests for life.

LaMorte said, "As much as we think in terms of choosing something in other areas of life, within the church we believe that we are called (by God)."

LaMorte said he got his calling when he was 9 years old, although he wasn't ordained until he was 30.

Another, much-trumpeted, difference between priests and other workers is their vow of celibacy.

The Catholic Encyclopedia, written to provide authoritative information on Roman Catholicism, states celibacy is necessary for priests to more completely adhere to Christian service and life.

According to the New York state Bureau of Labor's career advising Web site, careerzone.org, members of the clergy need to be active listeners, possess social perceptiveness and leadership skills to minister to others.

LaMorte added, "An important skill is helping people discover their talents and use them. You also have to be able to empower and encourage them."

Christian churches face many challenges today, of which declining numbers of clergy and declining church attendance are major ones.

According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, the number of Catholic priests have declined from 58,632 in 1965 to 41,794 in 2006. During that time, the number of men being ordained as priests annually fell by half, from 994 to 431.

The reasons for the downturn are varied, according to the study: more secular lifestyles, more career options and family pressure not to become priests.

According to a report by the Barna group, a company that conducts research in cultural and spiritual trends, the percentage of adults nationwide who attend church in a typical weekend declined from 49 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2004.

LaMorte said, "For some people going to church on Sunday is just interfering with the many things they want to do. As people are becoming more irreligious, a big challenge is to remind them of the importance of their religion and spirituality."

To do such a job effectively is one of the highlights of clergywork, Lamorte said.

"One of the most rewarding things is seeing our little boys and girls grow into young men and women who still hold on to their faith. It makes us proud to know that we have made an impression and touched their lives in important ways."

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