



**BISHOPSCOURT, 24 ST MARGARET'S STREET,  
ROCHESTER, ME1 1TS**

**Tel: (01634) 842721 Fax: (01634) 831136**

*"Proclaiming the Word and Work of God"*

To all clergy in the Diocese of Rochester

July 2009

Dear Colleagues,

### **Swine Flu**

You will be aware the Deputy Diocesan Secretary issued some guidance to you in May 2009. The Department of Health has now announced that the management of the Swine Flu Pandemic has changed from the 'Containment' to 'Treatment' phase. This has implications for the churches' response to the pandemic. I am therefore issuing additional directions to all parish clergy on how to respond to the various needs which will arise as a result of this situation. I am grateful for advice received from the Diocese of Chelmsford and much of what follows is indebted to that advice.

1. Churches should continue to arrange for services and to conduct business as normal, but they should use stringent hygiene measures for use with the chalice or common cup. This should only be of precious metal and not ceramic or other material for research has shown that the incidence of infection is considerably reduced when precious metal is used with alcohol. The use of antibacterial gel is recommended before handling the bread and chalices, as well as wiping the chalice with a purificator between communicants. There is no immediate need to change this policy. Should Government advise change, with a further increase in the level of alert, you will be notified, and further advice will be given. If you are able to check the Diocesan website, any changes will immediately be placed there. *Please note that the practice of intinction (dipping the bread in the wine) and giving communion directly onto the tongue are not to be encouraged. These customs may increase the possibility of spreading the virus.*

2. Clergy should be asked to give clear advice (in Sunday Notices, parish magazines etc) to members of their congregation who may be showing flu-like symptoms not to attend church services or other meetings. (Symptoms do not normally last for more than 7-10 days.) Hygiene in church should continue to be taken very seriously, and churches may wish to consider providing bins for used tissues (not the open waste-paper bin type, but a closed top, pedal or swing top bin.) Further information can be found on [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

3. The "Flu Friend" (or Flu Buddy) system will provide help for people who have been diagnosed positive for Swine Flu. Parishes are in a unique position to be able to offer help for congregation members and parishioners. The incumbent, parish administrator, or some other suitable person may be able to act as "Flu Friend Co-ordinator" in the parish, and their details could be posted in Parish Magazines, Pew Notices, etc. Suitable people may be recruited and given training to fulfil this role. This would mean that if someone receives a positive diagnosis for Swine Flu, they could contact that "Flu Friend Co-ordinator" who could put them in touch with a local "Flu Friend". This person would be able to pick up

prescribed medication on their behalf (avoucher or individual code is normally given when a positive diagnosis is made) and deliver it to them. In some cases, where people live on their own, they may also need some help with shopping. Clear guidance is available for "Flu Friends", but they should be advised not to enter the house, or to have direct contact with the infected person.

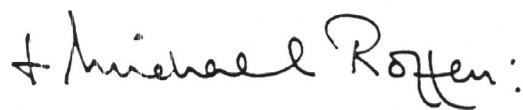
3. Pastoral visits and Home Communion for people who have been infected, by clergy or pastoral assistants is strongly discouraged. Contact by telephone, internet, or other means is to be encouraged! The risk of infection is very high, and a priest making a series of pastoral visits could spread infection, as well as being susceptible to becoming infected.

4. When a pastoral visit is absolutely necessary –if someone is so ill that they may be close to death, then very great care must be taken to prevent exposure to the virus. The virus is currently perceived as relatively mild, and for most people the symptoms will not be life-threatening, though people who are at high risk, because of a compromised immune system, or other health conditions may be more vulnerable. It must be noted that such people are likely to remain at home, as hospitals will not have the capacity to isolate and care for large numbers of people who are infected with the virus. In these cases clergy visiting infected people should wear personal protection equipment, including sterile gloves, apron, and face mask. If a priest anoints a sick person, or gives communion (host only) without wearing sterile gloves, they should wash carefully with hot water and antibacterial soap **immediately** afterwards.

It is not our intention at this stage to cause panic, or to exaggerate the seriousness of the situation. I believe that the measures I have outlined above will assist the churches in providing appropriate support in our congregations and parishes, whilst doing all that we are reasonably able to, to combat the spread of the infection.

With my prayers as we all struggle to respond, as well as we are able, to the difficult situation we are facing in this major health alert. I shall, of course, issue further instructions as the need arises.

In Christ's service

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Roffen:".