Considerations for the Use and Sanitation of Restrooms During the Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic

One area of concern is the possible transmission of COVID-19 through touching contaminated surfaces, and then touching one’s face, or transmitting the disease through aerosolized COVID particles. That is why it is recommended that doors in the church be propped open and masks be worn, so that transmission does not occur. One area which may be difficult to keep sanitized are the restrooms of the church, as well difficult to maintain “safe distance” by which to limit possible transmission.

Researchers studying hospital rooms in China where COVID-19 patients were treated found that air samples taken in COVID patients’ restrooms contained higher concentration of the virus than in the patient room itself. One theory is that when the waste of an individual who is shedding the virus is flushed, the virus becomes aerosolized and lands on the hard surfaces of the bathroom such as flush levers, toilet seats, floor, stall doors, floors etc. There is evidence that it may remain in the air for up to three hours. As a result, especially during Phase Two of the re-opening diocesan guidelines, each parish should discuss how best to maintain sanitization of restrooms.

Parishes may decide during Phase Two to not have restrooms be open for use, encouraging attendees to take care of such needs before they leave home. Of course there are those for whom this may not be possible, especially families with young children. Please consider the placement of disinfecting sprays in each stall to be utilized after each use. Signage to close the lids before flushing (to limit aerosolizing of COVID-19), and a request that lids, flush handles, seats, stall locks and handles be sprayed after using the toilet may be placed in each stall as a reminder. Soap must be maintained in bathroom dispensers so that hands can be thoroughly cleaned after each visit. Paper towels may be used to turn off water and open doors, with waste baskets placed near the door so they can be disposed upon leaving. There should be frequent cleansing of door handles of the restrooms when the building is in use. Once the building has fully opened, there may be a need to limit the number of individuals at one time in restrooms which have multiple stalls. In addition there may be a need for “social distancing” to be maintained at urinals and sinks. Again, disinfecting sprays or wipes should be utilized after each use of the facility so that the “dwell time” needed for each sanitation method has efficacy.

Please consider how best to keep parishioners and staff safe while utilizing the restroom facilities in your building. You may find more information on this at NIH and CDC websites.

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2 Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1 in New England Journal of Medicine, 2020 April 16;(382)16:1564-1567