

3rd June 'Comfort my People' EASING OF RESTRICTIONS ON WORSHIP

A Deacon-doctor reflects:

CNA (Catholic News Association) interviewed Deacon Timothy Flanigan, M.D., who worked to combat the deadly Ebola outbreak of 2014.

If someone asks him, "Is it safe for me to go to Mass?" Flanigan has one answer: "Are they following the guidelines the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) has provided us to decrease the risk of transmission?"

In his view, it is the wrong question to ask whether it is safer to go to *Bunnings* than to go to church. Rather, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidelines for group gatherings are paramount.

"The question is: can I follow the CDC guidance just as carefully, in each setting, in order to decrease transmission of coronavirus? Can I maintain safe distancing? Can I maintain good hand hygiene? Can I ensure that I am not ill?" said Flanigan, a professor of medicine at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University.

"Following that guidance is so important for all of us to do."

The CDC has clearly said that the primary mode of transmission is through the aerosolization of droplets, Flanigan said.

"We know that these droplets occur certainly when people cough, when they sneeze, when they sing, when they talk in a loud voice. There is more projection of these aerosolized droplets," he explained.

CDC guidance for people in groups is the same whether they are at a large store, a meeting, a workplace or at Mass.

“Their guidance says it is most important that we socially distance, that we don’t touch each other, because when we touch each other or when we share items, we come in contact with these droplets, and then when we touch our nose, our eyes, or our mouth, that gives the virus the ability to enter into those mucous membranes and cause infections.”

The CDC recommends that anybody with respiratory illness or an active cough should stay home.

For Flanigan, the question is: “is the CDC guidance being followed when a group of people get together, for whatever those reasons are? There is no reason to prohibit church services when you don’t prohibit other gatherings.”

A May 22 article in the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report considered a novel coronavirus outbreak at a rural Arkansas church from March 6-11. The report said that large gatherings pose a risk for Covid-19 transmission. Among the 92 attendees at the Arkansas church, 38% developed a laboratory-confirmed case of infection, and three died. Cases in the community linked to the church numbered 26, including one death.

While not commenting on any specific incident, Flanigan said these incidents of contagion at churches “occurred prior to the use of those guidelines.”

Following the current Australian guidelines, it is possible to have only 50 people in the nave of St Patrick’s church. - MMcE

