



March 13, 2020

Dear Faithful of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee,

Peace be with you!

No one could have anticipated the havoc the CoVID-19/Coronavirus would be causing in our society and our local communities. Both health-wise, economically, spiritually and socially, this is new territory for us. Because of that, I wanted to communicate some thoughts and recommendations for your consideration in your pastoral work, as well as update you on decisions that have been made diocesan-wide. Our response is constantly evolving, and we will continue to monitor events and adapt accordingly.

First, thank you for your steadfast concern for the people entrusted to your care at our parishes and schools. Your dedicated ministry to the spiritual and pastoral needs of your people is and should be our priority.

As you were notified yesterday, I have dispensed people from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, through Sunday, March 29, at which time we will reassess our situation. In addition, I would ask that you recommend to parishioners that communion be received in the hand versus on the tongue. This is not to dismiss personal piety and practice, but rather to make a choice that is best for the good of all. In the same manner, I am discouraging reception of the Eucharist via the Precious Blood. However, we must make sure some portion of the Precious Blood remains available for those who are gluten intolerant.

The Sign of Peace is part of the ritual of the Mass – it cannot be eliminated. However, how we express the exchange of peace with one another can be either eliminated or announced to only include a simple bow or nod.

For all these things, I want to exercise good judgment, with the acknowledgement that certain members of our parishes, especially those who are older or have some pre-existing medical condition, are going to be more vulnerable to a virus. We cannot provide guidelines for every situation or every individual. We will re-evaluate all these things after a two-week window. If you have specific questions, please call our offices for consultation.

Let's also be mindful of the needs of our people, especially those who are sick or are homebound. We want to exercise caution, but we also want to continue visiting the sick and bringing them communion, and anointing those who are ill. This is part of our ministry. Do not let fear interfere with your pastoral responsibilities, but use your own good judgement. As I read recently, the Church cannot be a field hospital if it is closed! Let's use common sense and remind our people to do the same – wash your hands; stay home if you are sick; avoid crowds; use hand sanitizer, etc.

ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

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Dr. Kathleen Cepelka, our Superintendent of Schools, is closely monitoring events related to Catholic Schools, working with both local school districts and public health agencies. Because our schools span 10 counties, things are a little more complex. Many of our students/families rely upon school-supplied services such as meal programs, before/after school care, or could be put in a position where students would be home alone, if face-to-face instruction were cancelled. School leaders need to work closely with their local public school district and local public health department, as well as our Schools Office, before any decision is made to close schools or stop face-to-face instruction.

We have a leadership team at the central offices that is monitoring developments and making recommendations on future actions. Right now, we have recommended that sporting events be cancelled, as well as school field trips, forensic meets and other extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. I have asked that our annual Catholic Stewardship Appeal Campanile Dinner be postponed. We are working with our Love One Another Capital Campaign consultants to determine what should or shouldn't move ahead with parishes in our pilot wave of the capital campaign. We have also directed that other "non-essential" programming, events, and training be postponed. We are looking at options for alternative delivery of formation programs, such as marriage preparation, etc. We don't anticipate cancelling Sacraments – Mass, Reconciliation, Confirmation – but we will continue to monitor what is happening.

Let's also remember, in times like this, people look to the Church for encouragement, reassurance and leadership. Your steady witness, calm presence and prayerful example, along with the celebration of the Sacraments of the Church, gives our people strength and comfort. Thank you for your dedicated ministry in service to Jesus Christ and His Church.

With assurance of my prayers, and asking for your intercessory prayers through Mary Mother of the Church, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

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