



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIocese of WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

March 5, 2020

Dear Brother Priests,

As you are all keenly aware, the media buzz surrounding the spread of the Influenza and Corona viruses continues to incite deep concern across the country and throughout the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston.

I do not want to foster a sense of panic surrounding the daily disease reports, but I would like to take this opportunity to address the situation with you.

Earlier this year, the Office of Worship and Sacraments distributed resources detailing a series of best practices regarding the spread of illnesses in our parishes and schools. I would like to reiterate some of those practices:

- If a person is sick and may be contagious, he or she should stay home. The obligation to attend Mass ceases if you are ill.
- If one has cold or flu-like symptoms, one does not have to exchange the Sign of Peace with others by shaking their hands. One can exchange greetings in Christ in a non-tactile way, such as bowing or nodding your head to your neighbors while saying, “the peace of Christ be with you.”
- If a parish has a custom of holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer, parishioners who are ill may fold their hands in a prayerful posture rather than taking others’ hands.
- While it is the norm in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to offer the Eucharist under both sacred species, it is advisable to refrain from drinking from the chalice if one feels ill. We still receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord when we receive the consecrated Host.
- The Bishop, Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should also wash their hands prior to Mass and, before distributing communion, always use waterless hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of 60% or greater. Hand sanitizer **MUST** be made available by the parish for use at Mass for this purpose.

I encourage you, my fellow shepherds of the faithful, to share this information with your parishioners.

All Priests
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While I currently do not see the need to postpone activities in our parishes and schools, or alter the liturgy in any way, we are monitoring the situation very closely and will make further announcements should they become necessary. I have included a few links below that the Diocese is using to monitor the situation, as well as a link to information available on the Diocesan website.

I recognize the extreme diversity of our great Diocese. The challenges faced in its different regions may differ greatly. I ask you to consult your local Health Department officials for updates about the local situation, for fact-based advice and for resources and information to help you reach a reasonable decision. Consult with your parishioners, especially your pastoral council, about any measure that may seem to be advisable, particularly on the need for 1.) suspending the distribution of the Precious Blood or 2.) foregoing the Sign of Peace.

It would be charitable to include a petition in the General Intercessions for the sick and for those who treat and care for them.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/usmap.htm>
https://dwc.org/download/all_files_&_forms/catholic_mutual_updates/CARES-Coronavirus-2019.pdf

Please be assured of my continued prayers for you and the faithful of our Diocese. I humbly ask that you keep me in your prayers as well.

Fraternally in Christ,



Most Reverend Mark E. Brennan
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston