



DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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MEMO

To: All Parishes/Parishioners in the Diocese of St. Catharines

From: Most Reverend Gerard Bergie

Date: March 12, 2020

Re: Coronavirus Concerns & Precautions

To date, Niagara Public Health and Haldimand and Norfolk Health and Social Services have no reported cases of the coronavirus. This will almost certainly change as they continue to monitor the situation and provide information and updates on their websites:

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/Novel-Coronavirus.aspx> and <https://hnhu.org/>.

While our area is currently considered low risk for the spread of the coronavirus, we cannot be complacent, and must take responsible measures for the health and safety of our community. To that end, all parishes are being asked to implement the following measures immediately and for as long as necessary.

- Remove Holy Water from fonts which parishioners use to bless themselves.
- Refrain from shaking hands at the Sign of Peace. Instead greet others with a simple nod, bow or verbal "Peace be with you".
- Forgo distribution of Holy Communion from the Chalice for parishioners, with the exception of those with Celiac disease. Communicants remain free to receive Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand. Those wishing to receive Holy Communion on the tongue should approach the priest or deacon.
- Ensure the general practice that all Eucharistic ministers wash their hands before Mass, and sanitize their hands before and after distributing Holy Communion. Altar servers are to wash and sanitize their hands before and after service at the altar.
- Parishioners are advised to avoid going to church if they are feeling unwell to prevent the possible spread of the virus. Parishioners are reminded that they are excused from their Sunday obligation of Mass attendance if they are unwell. At this time, the same applies to anyone with underlying medical issues or compromised health who may be more vulnerable if exposed to this virus.

- Everyone is urged to practice good hygiene with proper hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers, sneezing/coughing into your elbow, avoiding touching your eyes/nose/mouth, disposing of tissues appropriately, avoiding contact with people who are sick.
- If possible, hand sanitizer should be available at Church entrances.
- Please note that priests, deacons and extraordinary Eucharistic ministers will continue to provide sacramental care to parishioners who are home-bound and hospitalized.
- At this time, we are not recommending any changes to Mass schedules, Lenten observances or scheduled parish events. However, it is left to the discretion of parishes and other groups and organizations to consider postponing or cancelling meetings or social gatherings.
- We will continue to monitor the situation, and be attentive to the direction and advice of our public health officials. If further measures are required or recommended, we will communicate this to parishes and post the information on the diocesan website www.saintcd.com.

The most important thing that we can do, as people of faith, is to pray for those affected by the coronavirus, and for healthcare providers, caregivers, and researchers.

I have included with this memo a prayer that you may wish to offer as the world continues to deal with this pandemic.

“Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages curing every disease and illness. At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace” (America Magazine, March 2, 2020).