



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

13 March 2020

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons and Pastoral Associates,

May the Lord give you peace.

As the Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, I remain concerned about the continuing spread of COVID-19—especially now since I have received word of a confirmed case in our diocese. In addition, further verifying the seriousness of the situation, this past Wednesday, March 11, the World Health Organization declared that the virus's spread has become a pandemic—which indicates that the disease may spread around the globe. Currently, I and my staff are in daily communication with regional departments of health services agencies, as well as with local deans and surrounding dioceses, to monitor the situation and guide our local Church most effectively.

Last week, in my March 4 letter, I asked that pastors and parishes consider implementing measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Today I ask that the following seven mandatory steps be taken in each of our parishes until further notice so that we might be consistent in our practices and proactive in our response to this pandemic.

- 1) Beginning the weekend of March 14-15, 2020, all parishes must suspend the Sign of Peace. Consequently, during Mass, when the celebrant says, “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” and the people respond, “And with your spirit,” the celebrant forgoes the usual invitation to offer a Sign of Peace and moves immediately to the “Lamb of God.”
- 2) Liturgical ministers must wash and/or sanitize their hands before Mass, as well sanitize their hands before and after communion.
- 3) All ciboria need to be cleaned thoroughly before and after Mass.
- 4) The distribution of the Precious Blood to the faithful is to be suspended.
- 5) Pastors should ask the faithful to consider receiving communion in the hand (although communion is not to be denied to those who still wish to receive on the tongue).
- 6) Holy water stoups and fonts must be emptied.

7) The faithful should be reminded that, if they are ill, they are under no obligation to attend Mass and should remain at home until they recover from their illness. Also, those who are well, but who are concerned about the Coronavirus threat because of age, health condition or other reasons, are currently dispensed from the Sunday obligation until further notice. The Televised Mass is no substitute for attending Mass in person, but those who do remain home due to illness can pray with the Televised Mass broadcast in their area (see www.dioc.org/sacredworship/televised-mass/). For those who do not receive Holy Communion due to their absence or from fear of contracting the virus, practice a spiritual communion with the Lord, joining your own self—your prayers, works, joys, and sufferings—to his sacrificial presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

In addition to these mandatory measures, where possible, ushers should open church doors for those coming into and going out of the building; door handles should be sanitized regularly. Physical greeting before and after Mass such as handshakes or high fives should be suspended.

Last, please join me in our ongoing prayer to our Blessed Mother and St. Michael the Archangel, as well as our powerful diocesan patrons, St. Joseph the Workman and St. Francis of Assisi.

With personal good wishes and prayers, I am,

Fraternally yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse