

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update - Additional Precautionary Measures

MARCH 12, 2020

Office of Communications

Yesterday, the City of Houston and Harris County issued an emergency health declaration for our local community as a result of the developing story of the new presumptively positive case of Coronavirus characterized as “community spread” in Montgomery County, Texas. In addition, the City of Houston informed the public of their decision to either reschedule or cancel all City co-sponsored and City permitted events for the remainder of the month of March as a precaution to prevent the spread of the virus.

As a result of these developments, we are implementing the following measures:

Liturgical Celebrations

At this time when the faithful need to maintain some degree of normalcy in the midst of the current health crisis, the Archdiocese is recommending that each parish continue to maintain their regular Mass schedules for all those who wish to participate. Any parishioners who are uncomfortable about attending Sunday Mass due to the coronavirus are excused from the obligation to attend. In addition, if a parishioner is in the higher risk category due to current illness, age, or suffering from a chronic health condition or compromised immune system, they are also asked to remain at home.

We are also compiling a list of parishes that currently live stream Sunday Masses over the internet. If your parish has this capability, please forward this information to Jonah Dycus (jdycus@archgh.org or 713-652-8270) so the name of your Parish and the Mass time(s) may be identified on our website as an alternative option for those who are unable to attend Sunday Mass in person.

Please ensure that the Offertory gifts of bread and wine are sufficiently covered and protected if they are placed at the entrance to the nave before the start of Mass. Individual parishes also have the discretion to determine whether to keep the bread and wine covered in a sacristy until the Offertory.

As a precaution, we are also recommending the use of latex gloves for ushers and money counters. To the extent that interior doors may be left propped open or are held open by ushers, this will minimize the need for individual Mass attendees to use their hands to open doors.

Other Planned Gatherings & Events

With regard to other upcoming gatherings and events, we are encouraging parishes to delay or cancel retreats and other events scheduled to occur off campus, particularly overnight activities until after April 30, 2020. Any gatherings or planned activities taking place on the premises of the parish should be reviewed by the Pastors in consultation with parish leadership, and make a prudential judgment in determining whether they should be rescheduled or canceled. Some factors to be considered include the expected number of attendees and any risk factors within that population, keeping in mind the CDC is recommending controlling large gatherings of 250 or more.

We are also asking that you give serious consideration to suspending coffee and donuts following Sunday Masses, as well as Lenten Fish Fry events; however, you have the discretion to determine whether this is an appropriate decision for your individual parish.

Religious Education & Sacramental Preparation

We ask you to please consult with the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (Julie Blevins, jblevins@archgh.org or 713-741-8723) for guidance regarding suspending religious education instruction (possibly providing a home based method for parents to continue instruction away from the parish). In addition, the OEC staff is available to assist in addressing any questions regarding parent meetings for sacramental preparation and identifying alternatives to group gatherings.

Catholic Schools

The Superintendent of Catholic Schools and the staff of the Catholic School Office have been working diligently, in consultation with Principals in the Archdiocese, to ensure that the best decisions are being made for our school communities. In the event our Catholic schools need to suspend operations, schools have been sent resources to set up plans for instruction to continue electronically via the Internet, or they have been asked to create work assignments for up to two weeks for students to complete at home. The CSO is communicating directly with Principals regarding e-learning, closure concerns, etc.

Texas Medical Center Hospital Visits

It is the recommendation of the Catholic Chaplain Corps that if you have a parishioner in the Texas Medical Center that is in need of pastoral/sacramental care, please call the Catholic Chaplain Corps office 713-747-8445 and refer the family. The TMC hospitals have many new procedures and policies in place restricting access to patients on their campuses during this Coronavirus period. These TMC policies are changing rapidly as deemed necessary. All Masses in the TMC have been cancelled at this time until further notice.

This remains a dynamic and evolving situation. We will continue to monitor developments and will communicate any new recommendations or updates as soon as possible.