

Diocese of Lincoln Guidelines for Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 11, 2020

The Diocese of Lincoln urges all parishes, schools and diocesan institutions to take essential precautions to combat the spread of the coronavirus. Due to the seriousness of this threat, a diocesan task force on the coronavirus has been assembled by Father Christopher Kubat, a medical doctor. While each institution should develop its own plans against the coronavirus threat, the task force offers some precautions and guidelines.

The Center for Disease Control, together with the Bishops' Committee on Divine Worship reminds us that the influenza and coronavirus are spread through personal, physical contact with someone who is sick (either through inhaling the virus, or through hand-to-mouth transmission with a contaminated surface). The CDC says the best prevention is self-isolation of people who are sick, avoiding close contact with others, cleaning hands frequently, and covering one's mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

The CDC recognizes various "levels" to health crises. These diocesan guidelines are based on the CDC's response to any potential crisis that may be brought on by influenza or other infectious disease. At this time, we are in level one, heightened awareness.

Level one: Heightened awareness. Recommendations:

- 1) People who have flu-like symptoms or who are otherwise feeling sick should not go to Mass or other Church gatherings; the Church encourages us to make an act of "spiritual communion," where we unite ourselves to God through prayer.
- 2) Only the priest celebrant or concelebrants should receive the Precious Blood from the Chalice until otherwise notified.
- 3) It will be up to pastors to recommend whether the faithful should receive Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue.
- 4) The practice of exchanging the sign of peace is suspended.
- 5) Priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should wash hands with soap and water or anti-bacterial hand sanitizer, before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- 6) Omit the spontaneous gesture of hand-holding during the Our Father.

7) Do not hold Eucharistic and other liturgies in a daily mass chapel if there is a larger church at the parish.

8) Refrain from using Holy Water fonts.

9) Encourage ushers to open the doors to welcome the faithful at Mass.

10) The door handles should be sanitized after each Mass.

Level Two: A seriously heightened situation (when a major outbreak occurs). Look for imposed restrictions by the CDC or Nebraska State and County Health Officials. Added recommendations:

1) Ministers to the sick must carefully follow CDC regulations (masks, gloves, etc.) and any hospital or institution guidelines where they are serving.

2) All unnecessary contact between individuals or groups is to be eliminated (e.g. greeting people after mass, coffee and donuts, etc.).

3) People with compromised immune systems are encouraged to stay home even on Sundays.

Level Three: Endemic/critical health situation. Follow CDC, state and local Health Official's restrictions for public gatherings which may include the temporary closing of parish schools and churches.

While nothing can replace attending and participating in Sunday Mass or receiving Holy Communion, those who refrain from Sunday Mass due to illness have not committed a mortal sin.

In case of personal illness or suspension of Masses, Catholics should consider devoting an hour to prayer, observing Mass on television or the internet, and/or praying a rosary. A reminder that a Mass for shut-ins is televised every Sunday in the Lincoln area on KLKN-TV at 9:00 a.m. and in the Hastings area on KSNB-TV at 9:30 a.m.