



Orantes

The Newsletter of the Office for Worship
of the Diocese of Worcester

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It's not over...

In the past two weeks ordinations were celebrated in the Dioceses of Savannah and Lincoln. Within days it was discovered that an ordinand in one case and a visiting priest in the other were COVID+. As a result, more than a dozen concelebrating priests went into quarantine and their parishes were locked down.

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It's not over...

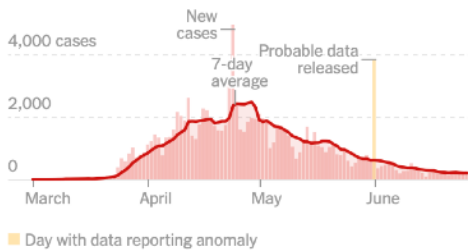
In just the past few days Churches in Houston, Fort Wayne and Sacramento were shuttered after their priests tested positive. In one case, the priest distributed Holy Communion without a mask in violation of Diocesan policies. Health authorities are urging those who received Holy Communion from him to quarantine for 14 days.

12,236 people have tested positive for Corona virus in Worcester county. The CDC estimates that the number of real infections could be as much as ten times that number.

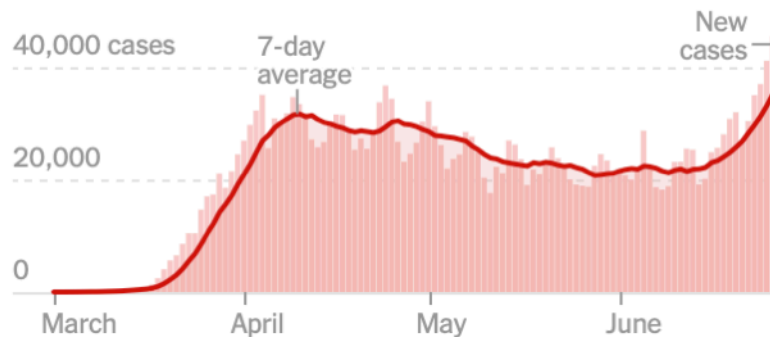
At the same time that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is experiencing a real and steady decline in the number of cases and deaths other parts of the country (and the world) which have previously experienced such a decline are overwhelmed with an explosion of new cases.

The pandemic is not over and if we fail to keep social distance, wear a mask and wash our hands and common surfaces the numbers will spike and more people will suffer and die.

This edition of *Orantes*, therefore, recaps what we know about how the virus is transmitted and how the effective accommodations we have adopted need to be maintained to keep us all safe.



MASSACHUSETTS COVID-19 CASES
NEW YORK TIMES. 27 JUNE, 2020



U.S. COVID-19 CASES
NEW YORK TIMES. 27 JUNE, 2020

Airborne Transmission

The primary means of transmission of the COVID-19 virus is by breathing in respiratory droplets from an infected person after they have coughed, sneezed, sung or even just talked for a period of time.

Of real concern is singing, which is a particularly effective way of spraying droplets of saliva in the same manner as a cough. “Those droplets can be made out of the mucus that coats the lungs and larynx, and could contain virus particles.”¹ Of still greater concern is the production of smaller particles suspended in an aerosol, particles so light that they travel “wherever the air currents take them.”² The analogy can be drawn to smelling freshly baked chocolate-chip cookies from across several rooms.



In response to advice from the Centers for Disease Control that congregations should “consider suspending or at least decreasing singing,” the Diocese of Worcester has mandated that Choirs be suppressed for the immediate future and that congregational singing be limited to the Gospel Acclamation, Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen, Agnus Dei and perhaps the refrain to the Responsorial Psalm, which may be sung from a cantor’s stand rather than the Ambo if it is more distant from the faithful. Opening, Closing and Communion procession music should be instrumental or sung only by a cantor. All the other parts of the Mass should be recited.

The dangers of airborne transmission of the virus is also the reason for requiring the physical separation of households and individuals by a space of at least six feet.³ For this reason Governor Baker has required the wearing of a mask

¹ “When Will It Be Safe to Sing Together Again?,” by Alex Marshall, in *New York Times*. June 9, 2020.

² Ibid.

³ The maintenance of an adequate social distance is also why processions through the Congregation, the exchange of the sign of peace and any unprotected close-up between priest, liturgical ministers and the faithful has been eliminated.

or face covering whenever a six foot social distance is not possible.

The maintenance of a minimum six foot social distance was carefully applied between priests, deacons, liturgical ministers and the faithful at the recent ordination to the Diaconate in Saint Paul’s Cathedral. It is worthy of note that while “40% of building capacity” in the Cathedral is over four hundred, only 226 people were able to be seated while maintaining a six foot social distance. It is important to bear in mind that priests, in particular, should never be seated closer to each other than six feet unless they live in the same rectory, lest they they risk the inadvertent transmission of the virus.



The inherent dangers of such transmission were brought home in the Cathedral Rectory this year. When a resident Spanish-speaking seminarian began to show symptoms of COVID-19 on Monday of Holy Week he was tested and isolated and another Spanish-speaking seminarian was brought in to take his place for the bi-lingual liturgies of the Paschal Triduum. While the first seminarian tested negative for the virus, the second seminarian subsequently tested positive for COVID-19 after serving at all the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum.

The seven remaining residents of the Cathedral were then forced to enter a fourteen day quarantine, during which two more of them manifested symptoms and were diagnosed as COVID+. One of the residents suffered the loss of taste and was quarantined for over a month, while the second was hospitalized with respiratory symptoms for ten days. The remaining five residents quarantined for fourteen days without manifesting symptoms.

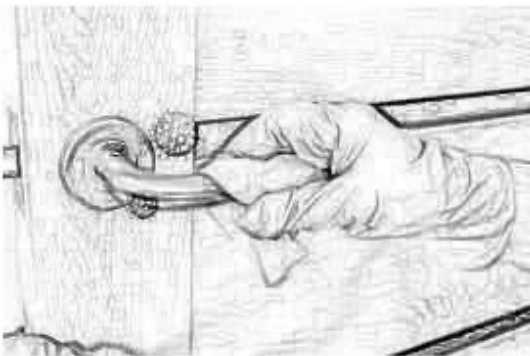
This cautionary tale is designed to underline the seriousness with which we should approach the potential transmission of the virus and the ease in which a “hot spot” can ignite, even in a rectory and a Church.

Transmission by Surfaces

While the primary mode of transmission for COVID-19 is through close contact from person-to-person, there is also a danger of getting the virus by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. While not the primary way in which the virus is spread, “based on data from lab studies on COVID-19 and what we know about similar respiratory diseases, it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it...”⁴

For this reason, the guidelines of the Diocese of Worcester have emphasized the importance of frequent cleaning of all common surfaces, including pew backs and the removal of hymnals, missalettes and multi-use paper products.

While, out of an abundance of caution the distribution of Parish Bulletins has been discouraged, a review of recent studies indicates that minimal risk is involved with parishioners taking a single use bulletin from a stack on a table as they leave Church. Like all common surfaces, however, the table should be regularly sanitized and ushers should not distribute the bulletins in person, lest they violate the requisite social distance.



⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0522-cdc-updates-covid-transmission.html>

Distribution of Holy Communion

A carefully constructed process for the distribution of Holy Communion, mandated by Bishop McManus in the 18 May 2020 issue of *Orantes* includes the sanitization of hands, the wearing of a mask by the minister of Holy Communion, the provision of a table with corporal and hand sanitizer for use by the minister and the marking of the path to Communion with tape indicating the minimum social distance to be observed by the communicant. Provision is also made for the expression of a public health preference for Communion in the hand, while assuring the right of the communicant to request and receive Holy Communion on the tongue.

While priests motivated by a desire to mitigate the spread of the virus have, at times, modified this process, such innovations have not always been well founded on either epidemiological or liturgical grounds. The use of disposable vessels, self-communication by the faithful or the denial of Communion on the tongue are not in keeping with the carefully considered policies which have been established. Any questions concerning these and other liturgical adaptations are best addressed to the Office for Worship before being introduced.



NEW COVID-19 FAQs

Can Parish Priests visit the Sick?

As noted in the May 28 edition of this newsletter, parish priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist may now consider it safe to visit the sick and celebrate the sacraments with them, provided that they take the proper precautions. At the same time, it would be prudent for older or more vulnerable priests to ask younger members of the clergy to take their place in this ministry for the immediate future.



What about priests visiting from other states?

Particular care should be taken in regard to priests visiting from outside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While the Commonwealth is presently experiencing a decline in COVID-19 infections, the cases in most of the country are growing at a disturbing rate. For this reason the Governor has asked that all persons arriving in the Commonwealth self-quarantine for a period of fourteen days. Particular attention should be paid to visiting priests who through their ministry might potentially infect scores of parishioners.

Are there still limitations on the meeting of groups?

Yes. While Masses and other liturgical and devotional services are allowed in the main Church with a six foot social distance for up to 40% of building capacity, this does not apply to other Church-related gatherings, such as educational, social, administrative or support groups.

In his revised order of 8 June 2020, Governor Baker mandates that “Gatherings that bring together more than ten persons into close proximity in any confined indoor or outdoor space remain prohibited throughout the Commonwealth.”⁵ Even gatherings of less than ten people, while allowed, must always maintain a six foot social

⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/doc/june-6-2020-regulating-gatherings-throughout-the-commonwealth/download>

distance and all common surfaces should be regularly cleaned.

It might be noted that the Governor’s order does **not** prohibit “gatherings of more than ten people in an unenclosed, **outdoor space** such as a park, backyard, athletic field or parking lot, provided that (a) each person in attendance is able regularly to maintain at least six feet of distance from others in attendance; and (b) the type of gathering at issue has not been prohibited or the outdoor space in which the gathering will take place has not been closed to the public by a previous Executive Order designating it as a phase III or Phase IV enterprise or venue.”⁶ These presently prohibited outdoor gatherings include “community, civic, public, leisure, sporting events, concerts, conferences, conventions, fundraisers, fairs, festivals, walkathons, road and bike races and other organized athletic or recreational events.”⁷



⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-covid-19#is-it-safe-to-attend-events-and-gatherings?>

Pope Francis Reflects on the Lockdown

On 20 June 2020 Pope Francis met with Medical personnel from Lombardy and discussed the past few months of lockdown in the midst of pandemic. Excerpts of the Holy Father's reflections are provided here for our readers.



During these troubled months, various segments of Italian society have endeavored to cope with the health emergency with generosity and commitment. I am thinking of national and regional institutions, of municipalities; I think of dioceses and parish and religious communities and the many voluntary associations. We have felt more than ever a gratitude for doctors, nurses and all health professionals at the forefront of performing an arduous and sometimes heroic service. They have been a visible sign of humanity that warms the heart. Many of them fell ill and some unfortunately died in the exercise of their profession. We remember them in prayer and with much gratitude.

In the whirlwind of such an epidemic with shocking and unexpected effects, the reliable and generous presence of medical and paramedical staff has constituted a safe point of reference, first of all for the sick, but in a very special way for family members, who did not have the opportunity to visit their loved ones. And so they found in you, health workers, almost another family, capable of combining professional competence with that attention which is a concrete expression of love. Patients often felt they had "angels" at their side who helped them recover their health and, at the same time, comforted them, supported them, and sometimes accompanied them to the threshold of their final meeting with the Lord.

These health care workers, supported by hospital chaplains, testified to God's closeness to those who suffer; they have been silent artisans of a culture of proximity and tenderness, a culture of proximity and tenderness. And you have witnessed it, even in the small things: in the caresses...even by a cell phone connecting an elderly person who was about to die with his son or daughter to say

goodbye to them; small gestures of love creatively expressed. This has done us all well, this testimony of proximity and tenderness.



Dear doctors and nurses; the world has been able to see how well you have done in the face of a great test. Even when exhausted, you have continued to carry out your work with professionalism and self-sacrifice... The pandemic has deeply affected people's lives and the left its mark on the history of so many places. We must honor the suffering of the sick and the many deceased, especially the elderly, whose lives must not be forgotten... In this way, we will be able to emerge from this crisis spiritually and morally stronger, ever depending on the conscience and responsibility of each individual. But not the individual alone, for it is only by being together as believers that, by the grace of God, we can testify that God does not abandon us, but gives meaning in Christ to this reality and to our limitations; that with God's help even the toughest tests can be faced. God created us for communion, for fraternity, and now more than ever focusing everything on ourselves creates an illusion. Indeed, relying on individualism as the guiding principle of society proves itself to be an illusion. So be careful because, as soon as the emergency is over, may fall back into this illusion and forget that we need others, someone to take care of us and give us courage; to forget that we all need a Father who holds out his hand. Pray to him, invoke him, for he is not an illusion; the illusion is to think of doing things without him! Prayer is the soul of hope.

In recent months, people have not been able to participate in liturgical celebrations in person, and have often lost the sense of being a community. They have prayed individually or as a family, and have been spiritually united and sensing the embrace of the Lord through the means of social communication. The pastoral zeal and creative concern of many priests has helped people to continue on the path of faith and not remain alone in the face of pain and fear.

This priestly creativity that reached out to so many is contrasted with priests who expressed an "adolescent" reaction to authority when that authority sought to exercise its obligation to protect peoples' health. Most priests were obedient and creative and I admired their apostolic spirit calling people, knocking on doors, and asking "Do you need anything? I can do the shopping ... " A thousand things. Proximity and creativity, without shame.

Those priests who remained by their people in caring and daily sharing were a sign of the consoling presence of God. They were fathers, not teenagers. Sadly, not a few of them have died, as have doctors and other medical staff. Indeed, even among you there have been priests who got sick and, thank God, recovered. In you I thank all the Italian clergy, who have shown courage and love to their people.

Dear brothers and sisters, I express again to each of you and to those you represent my deep appreciation for what you have done in this difficult and complex situation. May the Virgin Mary, venerated in your region in numerous shrines and churches, accompany you and always support you with her maternal protection. And don't forget that with your work, all of you, doctors, paramedics, volunteers, priests, religious, lay people, you have begun a miraculous work...May this miracle that you have begun end well!

For my part, I continue to pray for you and your communities with affection and I impart a special Apostolic Blessing on you. Please, don't forget to pray for me, I need it. Thank you.



A Prayer in Time of Pandemic

O God,
whose Only Begotten Son
bore the weight of human suffering
for our salvation,
hear the prayers of your Church
for our sick brothers and sisters
and deliver us from this time of trial.

Open our ears and our hearts
to the voice of your Son:
Be not afraid, for I am with you always.

Bless all doctors and nurses,
researchers and public servants;
give us the wisdom to do what is right
and the faith to endure this hour,
that we might gather once again
to praise your name in the heart of your Church,
delivered from all distress
and confident in your mercy.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

