



DIocese of BAKER

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The coronavirus is coming to visit. How long it will stay or how far it will reach, no one can say. Governments at all levels are implementing measures to impede its arrival, slow down its spread, and hasten its departure. As a church we have an important part to play in limiting its society-wide impact; so I want to let you know the anti-viral policy of the Diocese of Baker. It is grounded in three underlying considerations: caution, Mass attendance, and parish confidence.

First, we're all new to the story, so we don't know how it will play out. Therefore, at this point we're erring on the side of caution and cancelling most parish events except Mass until the danger lessens. Over the next month we will be continually re-assessing the situation in order to adapt to developments accordingly.

The second consideration is this: those whose age or health condition makes them fearful of coming to Mass should not feel compelled to endanger themselves by attending. Therefore, mindful of their heightened vulnerability to infection, I hereby dispense the following groups of people from their obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation as long as the coronavirus threat persists:

- the elderly (those over 60)
- people with compromised immune systems or other at-risk medical conditions
- people who are not feeling well, regardless of age or symptoms
- any other persons, of whatever age, who sincerely fear they may put themselves at risk of catching the virus at Mass.

If you fit in any of these categories, you may stay home on Sundays with a clear conscience. The commandment to "keep holy the Lord's Day" never requires you to put your health at risk. Furthermore, staying home will increase the number of parishioners who "self-quarantine" and thereby reduce regular attendance to a level below the 250-person limit set by the Governor.

The third and final consideration is that parishioners rightly expect to be safe from contagion when they come to church. Therefore, to instill such confidence, everyone should know the following “social distancing” measures that parishes are to implement at all Masses:

- Sunday Masses will be celebrated on a schedule the pastor determines, with the inclusion of an additional Mass when feasible;
- holy water fonts are to be left empty;
- the collection basket is not to be passed from hand to hand in the pews;
- the sign of peace will not be exchanged by parishioners;
- Holy Communion will be distributed only under the species of bread; only the priest and the deacon will drink from the chalice;
- as much as feasible those in attendance should maintain a safe distance from each other and avoid physical contact.

I encourage those who refrain from attending Sunday Mass to celebrate in solidarity with your parish community by gathering as a household to read the Scriptures of the Sunday Liturgy, to pray the Rosary, and to make an Act of Spiritual Communion. These texts, as well as updates on coronavirus developments, you can find on the diocesan website (dioceseofbaker.org).

My brothers and sisters, we worship the One Who makes all things new. May He lead us together through this unusual Lent with more than usual grace.

In Christ our Redeemer,



Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker