



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIocese OF LAFAYETTE

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March 13, 2020

Dear Clergy, Religious and Laity of the Diocese of Lafayette:

Today, Governor John Bel Edwards issued an Executive Order asking people to refrain from attending gatherings of more than 250 people beginning today, Friday March 13 until Monday, April 13 in an effort to prevent the further spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). It is important for us as people of faith and citizens of Louisiana to cooperate with the Governor's order for the health and well-being of our community.

Therefore, I am dispensing the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Lafayette from the obligation to attend Sunday Masses (and Saturday anticipated Masses) throughout the duration of the Governor's executive order. These dates may be updated as needed. I highly encourage those who are elderly, sick, experiencing symptoms of illness, or who are at high risk of illness to not attend Mass on these weekends. The virus has been contracted with serious issues by those 60 years and older. Those individuals in that age group must take seriously the caution to implement "social distancing."

For those who cannot and choose not to attend Mass, the Cathedral of Saint John the Evangelist will broadcast live on a daily basis on AOC as well as on the diocesan website <https://diolaf.org>. Saint Mary Mother of the Church broadcasts daily Mass on its main page at <https://stmarych.com/>. Saint Pius X Church will broadcast the Sunday Mass and can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/stpiusxchurch>. There are also other daily opportunities for televised Mass on EWTN. Let me be clear that I am not anticipating or encouraging any changes in parish Mass schedules. Please be advised that all previously released guidelines from March 4, 2020 remain in effect with some modification:

1. The faithful should not attend Mass or other services/gatherings if they have symptoms of illness (respiratory symptoms—coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath, and/or a temperature above 100°F). They should be reminded that it is not sinful to miss Mass when one is sick (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2181). Remaining at home under these circumstances is an act of charity to our neighbors.
2. Please refrain from holding hands during the "Our Father."
3. All Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to sanitize their hands immediately before and immediately after distributing Holy Communion preferably outside of the sanctuary. Pastors should make alcohol-based sanitizers available.
4. All Ministers should be diligent to avoid unnecessary hand contact whether Communion is distributed on the tongue or on the hand. When blessings are offered during distribution of Holy Communion, the Minister is to avoid physical contact.
5. It is recommended that the faithful receive Holy Communion in the hand. However, Holy Communion on the tongue is not to be refused.

6. Holy Communion shall be offered to the faithful only under the form of the consecrated bread alone. The Precious Blood will not be distributed.
7. For those parishes with upcoming Confirmations, those will go on as scheduled.
8. Furthermore, I am taking this opportunity to advise parishes that while they may continue their Parish Friday Fish Frys at the pastor's discretion; however, they should refrain from hosting a dine-in option in favor of a take-out option only.
9. Parishes hosting St. Joseph Altars should give strong consideration to the Governor's Executive Order and make plans accordingly. I ask that those parishes planning a public serving of a meal in conjunction with their St. Joseph Altar consider suspending that practice this year.
10. Please remind volunteers to practice good hygiene throughout these events.

As you may be aware, in conjunction with the Governor's decision to close all public schools until April 13, 2020, I have directed that all Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Lafayette follow the same school closure schedule as stated in the Governor's directive. Accordingly, I am directing that all Catechism (Parish School of Religion, CCD, etc.) for youth also be cancelled until April 13, 2020. RCIA formation may continue. We will continue to monitor this very fluid situation and further directives will be issued as warranted.

I encourage you, the faithful of our Diocese, to remember all persons affected by the Coronavirus by the recitation of the Holy Rosary (individually and as families). Also, as we prepare to inaugurate a year of special devotion to Saint Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church on March 19, let us pray through his intercession for trust in God, healing and a speedy end to this public health crisis.

With prayers for your good health, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. Douglas Deshotel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend J. Douglas Deshotel, D.D.
Bishop of Lafayette

JDD:mhb