



DIOCESE OF
METUCHEN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Diocese of Metuchen takes precautions to prevent spread of COVID-19

PISCATAWAY – Amid growing national concern over the spread of the coronavirus, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen has enacted measures in parishes across its four counties as a precaution.

The Most Rev. James F. Checchio, Bishop of Metuchen, has issued the following directives on liturgical practices to be observed in all parishes, institutions and organizations within the Diocese of Metuchen, effective immediately until otherwise notified:

- As is practiced in so many of our parishes already, priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are urged to practice good hygiene, washing their hands and using anti-bacterial hand sanitizer before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- Any individual who is sick or has flu-like symptoms should not attend Mass or other Church gatherings. Mass is broadcast on several television channels and also livestreamed on the Cathedral's website: stfranciscathedral.org, so the sick can make a "spiritual communion" until they return to good health.
- The sign of peace should be exchanged without physical contact.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood of Christ from the chalice is to be suspended. Furthermore, no member of the faithful is obliged to receive the Body of Christ on the tongue; worthy, reverent reception by hand is preferred until otherwise notified.

"Any time there is a serious outbreak that poses a risk to public health, pastors in the Diocese of Metuchen are asked to monitor the progression of the outbreak and take any and all necessary precautions in their own parishes to prevent the spread of infection," said Anthony P. Kearns III, Esq., spokesperson and chancellor for the Diocese of Metuchen. "As Catholics, we believe that the true body and blood of our Lord, together with his soul and divinity, exist under the forms of bread and/or wine," said Kearns.

The general message from the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health is that all should be prepared, but not panicked. The diocese will continue to monitor advisories from Catholic and other organizations regarding precautions on the coronavirus and share any appropriate information with the faithful and the parishes.

“As communities across the globe respond to the Coronavirus, we stand in solidarity with them and pray for all those affected by the Coronavirus and those health workers diligently working to combat the disease,” said Kearns.

On February 18, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Catholic Relief Services, and the Catholic Health Association of the United States issued a joint statement in response to the outbreak of the coronavirus:

As communities and public health officials respond to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in China and closely monitor its presence and progression in other parts of the world, we join in solidarity and prayer for those impacted or working to treat those infected by the disease. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, and the Catholic Health Association of the United States hope that governments will work together in partnership to improve all nations' capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to this virus.

The Catholic Church in the United States stands in solidarity with those affected by the coronavirus and their families, health workers who are valiantly trying to diagnose and treat patients, and those under quarantine awaiting results of their screening for the virus. We offer our prayers for healing and support those organizations, both domestic and international, working to provide medical supplies and assistance to address this serious risk to public health.

In early February, the Holy See sent 700,000 respiratory masks to China to help prevent the spread of the disease. Within the United States, Catholic healthcare providers are at the front line of providing treatment and care to those impacted by the virus.

We also commend the U.S. government for transporting more than 17 tons of donated medical supplies to China. This response to the novel coronavirus demonstrates the critical importance of the need to work together and to invest in crucial health care systems here and in other countries, thus preventing and responding to community-wide emergencies. We urge the U.S. Congress to support these efforts by protecting access to domestic health care safety net programs and by providing additional emergency international assistance to areas impacted by the virus.

We also urge individuals to stay informed as information becomes available by going to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/COVID19.

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