



Catholic Diocese  
of Cleveland

## Memorandum

*Cathedral Square Plaza*

OFFICE OF THE DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATOR

**TO:** The Faithful of the Diocese of Cleveland  
**FROM:** Fr. Donald P. Oleksiak, Diocesan Administrator  
**DATE:** 12 March 2020  
**RE:** Coronavirus Update

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Today, March 12, 2020 Gov. Mike DeWine issued an executive order regarding the avoidance of large mass gatherings to help limit the spread of COVID-19 in Ohio.

Even though religious gatherings are expressly excluded in the order, the Catholic bishops of Ohio -- out of concern for the common good and the physical as well as spiritual well-being of all of the people of Ohio -- have agreed to cooperate with the governor's direction to create "social distance."

**Therefore, Catholic faithful who reside in Ohio and all other Catholics currently in Ohio are dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass** for the weekends of March 14-15, March 21-22 and March 28-29.

Out of charity and concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ, **we encourage all the faithful, in particular those who are sick, experiencing symptoms of illness, or are at risk of illness to seriously consider refraining from Mass attendance.**

As much as possible, parish Mass schedules should remain unchanged to allow the faithful to offer worship to almighty God and receive the great grace of the sacraments during this trying time. However, we recognize that this may not be possible because many of our senior priests may themselves be at risk. We ask for understanding and flexibility in this regard

All other gatherings of 100 people are to be cancelled until further notice. This includes fish fries, bingo and other parish social, athletic or other non-liturgical or non-sacramental events of over 100 people. Parishes sponsoring fish fries may consider staging outdoor, drive-through fish fry pick-up if their parish is so configured and if the Ohio Department of Health distancing and other precautionary directives (including the 100-person indoor restriction) can be maintained.

### **Diocesan schools:**

After school on Monday, March 16, all Ohio K-12 schools -- including Catholic schools and PSR -- will cease gathering in person for the next three weeks at the direction of the state of Ohio. This will include all school-sponsored events, activities, clubs, athletics and the like through at least April 3. Schools and parishes are also to prohibit mass gatherings of more than 100 people for the foreseeable future -- even beyond April 3 -- until the emergency has passed.

## **PSR and parish sacramental programs, RCIA**

Parish Schools of Religion, faith formation or sacramental preparation programs should respond to public health concerns in a reasonable manner and should follow the directives and recommendations of the appropriate governmental and medical authorities, including the state of Ohio. When local Catholic and/or public schools are closed or have cancelled all evening and weekend activities due to public health concerns, PSR programs should also be cancelled.

The convening or gathering of Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults' (RCIA) preparation sessions should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by each parish. Depending on the size and demographic of the group, parishes may consider meeting in alternative ways. Special considerations include the size of the gathering as well as the age of the participants. People with pre-existing conditions including cardio-pulmonary diseases or autoimmune conditions should not be required to meet in-person.

## **Preventative measures**

The ODH provides the following information outlining precautionary measures that people should take. These precautions are the same commonsense hygiene precautions recommended to prevent the flu, including:

- Avoid close contact with sick persons.
- Cover mouth/nose with tissue/sleeve when coughing/sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing/sneezing.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth after touching objects.
- Practice good health habits (clean home, adequate sleep, healthy stress management).

Thank you for taking the preventative measures prescribed by our public health officials to protect our community.

Please continue to reference the diocesan website for continuing updates on the Church's response to the coronavirus situation and note that the Diocese of Cleveland offers Mass on television on Fox 8 every Sunday at 6 a.m., and Mass can be viewed on number of cable channels including ETWN, and heard on AM 1260 radio, The Rock. Check local listings.

Please join us in praying for all who are suffering from illness or disease of any kind, and for an easing of the tension caused by this situation. May Our Lady of Lourdes, health of the sick and Mother of Mercy, intercede for us, and may the Holy Spirit continue to guide and protect us all.