



1821 Jackson Street 712-233-7513-Office of Communications susano@scdiocese.org

PRESS RELEASE

In an unprecedented move, Bishop R. Walker Nickless of the Diocese of Sioux City issued mandates to the priests and deacons of his diocese Friday afternoon after consulting with his advisors regarding the current COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. The actions were made in an effort to help stop the spread of the coronavirus.

In his memo, Bishop Nickless has dispensed "all Catholics over age 65 and anyone, regardless of age, with underlying medical issues, from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass." Also, those with a sincere belief that they are at risk or are ill do not have to attend Mass.

The distribution of the Precious Blood in the form of wine in the chalice at Communion is to be suspended immediately. The bishop also "strongly recommended that Communion in the form of the Body of Christ, or host, be received in the hand as opposed to on the tongue.

Bishop Nickless has decided to cancel several diocesan events "in the abundance of caution," including:

- The March 28 Women's Conference in Storm Lake
- The April 2 Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of the Epiphany in Sioux City
- The April 4 Men's Conference in Le Mars
- All deanery holy hours and meetings of priests and deacons in the diocese

The memo also explained pastors at all diocesan parishes are mandated to remove holy water from "hand fonts," and must provide hand sanitizer at church entrances. Other mandates include:

- Greeters should refrain from shaking hands or touching parishioners and should not hand out bulletins or other materials.
- Remove missalettes, hymnals, papers and other loose materials from the pews. If missalettes and hymnals are distributed at the door, those should also be removed.
- Remind the lay faithful, if possible, to sit with some distance between one another.
- Take the collection in such a way that eliminates handing the basket from person to person.
- Suspend the procession of the offertory gifts and keep them covered on the credence table.
- Do not hold hands during the *Lord's Prayer*, as there is no liturgical directive that requires this.
- Eliminate the Sign of Peace and the subsequent shaking of hands, as liturgical norms allow this to be omitted at Mass.
- Re-enforce the practice of hand sanitizing for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- Be particularly mindful of cleansing the vessels used during Mass after each use.
- Refrain from greeting the priest and others after Mass with handshakes or physical contact.

Bishop Nickless asked that pastors consider the following two recommendations:

- Pastors are advised to evaluate all parish activities and determine whether or not they should be cancelled or postponed.
- Priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion to the sick at nursing homes and hospitals should follow the guidelines established by those institutions.

Regarding the diocesan Women's Conference and Men's Conference, Fred Shellabarger of the Office of Evangelization and Discipleship explained all preregistration fees will be refunded. The office will consider organizing similar events in the future when it is safe to do so.

This bishop also asked the clergy and staff to join him in prayer for all those throughout the world affected by the coronavirus to join him in prayer, as well as the medical personnel assisting them.

The public should follow www.scdiocese.org and the diocesan social media accounts in this rapidly changing situation.

Cutline: Bishop R. Walker Nickless and Very Rev. David Esquiliano, rector of the Cathedral of the Epiphany, distribute communion in the form of the Body of Christ at the cathedral. The bishop strongly recommends that the communion in this form only be received in the hand as opposed to on the tongue, and the distribution of the precious Blood in the form of wine is to be suspended at this time.