



207/2020  
10 March 2020

Dear Father,

Thank you for your prayers and your pastoral responsiveness as we respond to growing concerns about the spread of influenza and 2019 novel coronavirus [COVID-19] infections. As promised we are updating you regarding the advancement of the virus. As you may have heard, the COVID-19 virus has spread to Ohio and, in particular, at the writing of this letter three reported cases have been found in Cuyahoga County. The Ohio Department of Health and Ohio state government is stepping up its public health efforts in response. We are following local, state and national health care directives.

Reported [COVID-19] illnesses across the U.S. have ranged from very mild (including some with no reported symptoms) to severe, including illness resulting in death. Older people and people of all ages with severe underlying health conditions, such as heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, seem to be at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.

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).

**In an effort to safeguard the faithful now that the coronavirus has emerged in Northeast Ohio, the following liturgical changes are to be observed, effectively immediately:**

#### **HOLY COMMUNION**

- All priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to wash their hands with soap and water prior to the celebration of Mass. A hand sanitizer may be used in the pew by the extraordinary minister prior to the distribution of Holy Communion. In addition to the usual purification of fingers with water after the distribution of Holy Communion, all Communion ministers should again wash their hands. The Centers for Disease Control states that hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of the virus.

- The distribution of the Precious Blood to liturgical ministers and the faithful is to be suspended. As Catholics, our faith informs us that the whole Christ, that is his Body and Blood, is present when only the host is received. Provisions, however, should be made for Catholics who can only receive the Precious Blood for Communion because of celiac conditions.

### **SIGN OF PEACE**

- The invitation to the Sign of Peace, although a regular part of our liturgical practice, is always an option. Pastors should consult the local community for how to best observe the Sign of Peace during this period. Perhaps a head bow could replace the customary handshake.
- Additionally, small holy water blessing fonts and baptismal pools are to be drained.
- Intentions for the prevention of the virus and for those affected should be included in the Universal Prayer.

The above directives are to be observed until further notice. Everyone is encouraged both during the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and at all times to be thoughtful and vigilant in practices that prevent the spread of sickness and disease and protect the good health of one another.

Please continue to monitor the Ohio Department of Health and the CDC websites as well as official communications from the diocese for accurate information in this developing public health situation. I will continue to provide updates on a weekly basis, and more frequently, if necessary.

Please know that you remain in my prayers, and in your charity, kindly remember me in your prayers.

Fraternally yours in Christ Jesus,



Rev. Donald P. Oleksiak  
Diocesan Administrator  
Diocese of Cleveland