

Diocese of Pittsburgh

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Office of the Bishop

March 28, 2020

My dear Brother Priests, Deacons and Seminarians,

As we are continually being updated by our civic leaders and through the media, the number of those who are being tested positive for COVID-19 is increasing dramatically each day. Just today, reports are that an additional 533 cases in addition to 12 new deaths are reported in our commonwealth.

This morning, I received calls from two of our pastors with news that affects not just them and the priests assigned with them but all of us. The clergy team members that serve the groupings (Saint Paul Cathedral, Saint Regis, Saint Rosalia, and Saint Stephen) in addition to the grouping of (Saint Bernard and Our Lady of Grace) are all being self-quarantined out of absolute caution and prudent care for the faithful entrusted to their service and to the public. This measure is warranted in light of their contact with someone who has tested positive.

Father Adam Potter, who is a parochial vicar of the Greenfield, Hazelwood, Oakland grouping as well as the Chaplain for Oakland Catholic High School in Oakland; and Father Thomas Gramc, a parochial vicar of the Dormont, Mount Lebanon, Scott Township grouping as well as Chaplain at Seton LaSalle High School, have shown mild symptoms. Both are being tested. Information is being shared with those who may have had contact with the priests. Both high schools have been closed since March 13. Neither priest has had any contact with the students or faculty since then.

My fear is that these two situations could be replicated in other parishes or parish groupings as well.

This latest news necessitates that I put into place further provisions on how we best serve our people spiritually at the time of this pandemic.

Beginning immediately and until further notice:

1. All church buildings must be securely locked with no exceptions. One of the things that we have been told is that the coronavirus can live on surfaces for an extended time.
2. The celebration of the sacraments must be regrettably suspended:
 - **Baptisms:** The celebration of baptism is to be suspended. For the health and safety of all, these baptisms are to be delayed until the Church is able to celebrate the sacraments publicly once more. In case of emergency (in danger of death), any person may baptize. It is essential to follow the rite of the Church in baptizing. As is indicated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “In case of necessity, any person can baptize provided that he have the intention of doing that which the Church does and provided that he pours water on the candidate’s head while saying: ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’” (CCC, no. 1284). If baptism occurs, it is imperative to contact the parish

immediately so that the proper information may be entered into the baptismal register and the priest may be notified so that the ceremonies may be celebrated afterwards.

- **Confession:** For the health and safety of all, the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation must also be suspended in all its forms: in church buildings, outside of church buildings, in parking lots, etc. Whenever the ban is lifted, priests will resume hearing confessions and granting absolution. Priests should remind the faithful the guidance from the USCCB: “Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452)”

Also as a reminder, the Holy See has offered a plenary indulgence for those who make some pious form of prayer and have the will to receive the sacraments when they are available under the normal conditions for an indulgence. That is, the indulgence is granted if the person has the will to receive the sacraments when they are available.

- **Anointing of the Sick:** The celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is to be suspended unless it is the most grave of circumstances. At that moment, the priest may receive the confession of the person to be anointed and grant absolution as indicated in the Rite. If the affected person is able to receive, he may administer *Viaticum*. In the actual anointing, all safety precautions are to be observed and the use of gloves and cotton balls should be used even if that dying person is not known to have the coronavirus. In these times, we must remind people about the extraordinary plenary indulgence granted by the Holy See. That indulgence is granted to those who are at the point of death are unable to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and *Viaticum* but wishing to receive the plenary indulgence have said at least a few prayers in their lifetime. (In this case the Church supplies for the other conditions normally needed.)
- **Funerals:** No Funeral Masses or services, inclusive of those at funeral homes, can be scheduled. Provisions are to be made for the celebration of Memorial Masses after the virus subsides. In the interim, priests are to remember the dead in their private Masses and their prayer intentions and to share that information with the family of the deceased as a source of consolation. Also, cemeteries have already indicated the prohibition of even a small number of people gathering for burial.
- **Weddings:** All weddings scheduled in the Diocese of Pittsburgh are to be postponed until further notice. While the churches will hold the date of the scheduled wedding, whether or not the sacrament can be celebrated on that date will depend entirely on whether the restrictions have been lifted. Priests and deacons are encouraged to speak to each couple and share this information with them and if necessary assist them in the rescheduling of the wedding.
- **Private Masses:** As has been our practice over the course of the last several weeks, and especially at this time, I encourage you to continue to celebrate private daily Masses for the intentions of our faithful and for an end to this pandemic.
- **Holy Week:** All of the norms concerning the celebration of Holy Week liturgies released this past week remain in place.

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Several weeks ago when I had to suspend the celebration of public Masses, I said it was the most difficult decision I have had to make as a Bishop.

Today's decisions are equally excruciating.

Our pastoral responsibility requires us to provide for the needs of those entrusted to our care. The most critical care we can offer to our people at this moment is to do all that we can to keep them connected with God and each other **and** to keep them safe in that care.

So many of you have joined the diocese in providing live streaming of Sunday and weekday Masses in addition to devotions such as the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, among others. Thank you for doing so. Please continue to "pull out all the stops" informing your people of those spiritual opportunities.

Second, we must work hard to protect the safety of our people. In reality, this is a significant Pro-Life issue at the time of this serious pandemic.

Finally, as I share this new information with you and my sincere gratitude to and for you, I also express my concerns about your well-being, certainly physical—but also emotional and spiritual.

If you are in **ANY** kind of need, please do not hesitate to contact your regional vicar. This is especially true if you believe that you have been exposed to or contracted the coronavirus. We may be more isolated because of this pandemic but we can't be separated because of who we are as brothers, one to another in the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

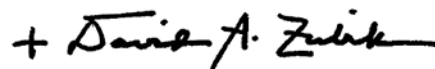
Yesterday, Pope Francis shared a most beautiful homily with the world community in an act that brought billions of people together in a very sacred hour.

During his reflection, Pope Francis said: "We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other."

Today and every day, I pray for the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh and the citizens of the world. And in a particular way, I pray for you that we together can be strong in the Lord. It is Jesus who gives us the strength to comfort each other and to be a source of strength for our faithful. Thank you again for being the hands, the face and the heart of Christ to others. Thank you for being the hands, the face and the heart of Christ to me. God bless you all.

Grateful for our continued efforts together in being *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, and for our belief that "Nothing is Impossible with God," I am

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Zubik". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

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