



ST. MARK CATHOLIC CHURCH

4200 Ripa Avenue

St. Louis, MO 63125

Phone: (314) 743-8600

March 14, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Yesterday Archbishop Carlson sent an updated letter to priests and deacons. Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and as the virus is present in the Greater St. Louis area, we continue to take **calm but prudent precautions**. After consulting with Archdiocesan leadership and local and federal health officials, Archbishop Carlson is mandating certain health and safety measures. He wrote:

- All Catholics within the Archdiocese of St. Louis are dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass for the next three weekends (March 14-15, March 21-22 and March 28-29). As with the Lenten practice of abstinence, we remind the faithful to exercise good judgement and not “excuse themselves lightly” from their obligation. Churches will remain open, and Mass schedules will remain mostly unchanged.
- Parishioners should not come to Mass, church activities or school if they are feeling sick or if their immune system is compromised. It is not a sin to miss Mass when they are sick.
- Catholics who attend Holy Mass are not required to receive Holy Communion more than once per year. No one is under any obligation to receive nor distribute Holy Communion. Catholics who choose to temporarily refrain from receiving Holy Communion may make an act of Spiritual Communion, uniting themselves worthily to our Lord’s true presence in the Most Holy Eucharist through prayer.
- **It is strongly recommended that parishioners receive Holy Communion in the hand.** Holy Communion distributed by **extraordinary ministers** will be administered in the **hand only**. However, as this is a celebration of God’s love for us and the most important part of our Mass, **parishioners who still wish to receive Holy Communion on the tongue should receive from the Mass celebrant or concelebrant only**. Any of our faithful who decide to receive on the tongue should not be refused by the Mass celebrant or concelebrant.
- Everyone who is sick, elderly or vulnerable because of a medical condition is urged to remain at home.
- The elderly, who are among the most vulnerable, have the option to participate in the Mass on TV or online via channels such as EWTN, and to request that Holy Communion be brought to their residence.
- Suspend the physical exchange of the sign of peace. Use a hand gesture or bow instead.
- Keep a distance of three feet from the nearest neighbor when possible.
- Suspend the distribution of Holy Communion via the chalice.
- No ministers, ordinary or extraordinary, should administer Holy Communion if they have signs of illness.
- All ministers, ordinary and extraordinary, delivering Holy Communion to the elderly, sick or homebound need to be in good health.
- Holy Water fonts should be drained and left empty at this time.
- Encourage the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer which should be placed in highly visible public areas. Remind parishioners of proper cough-and-sneeze etiquette (guidelines are available on the CDC website at cdc.gov).

- **Weddings/Funerals/Baptisms:** The decision regarding whether to continue with weddings and funerals should be made by the parish pastor. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends limiting attendance at these sacred events to immediate family members only, or rescheduling to a future date when possible. Parish pastors should determine whether to continue with baptisms. Where possible, the Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends postponing baptisms to a later date.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** It is recommended that the Sacrament of Penance be celebrated using a screen (anonymously) to ensure the health department's social distancing guidelines.
- **Parish fish fries:** The decision regarding whether to continue with fish fries should be made by pastors. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends limiting your fish fry to pick-up or drive-through options only, or where possible, canceling the fish fries until further notice.
- **Parish retreats and other group parish activities:** The decision regarding whether to continue with retreats and other group parish activities should be made by parish pastors. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends postponing retreats and other group activities/gatherings until further notice.
- **Collections:** Essential to the continued operation of our parishes and their missions, parishioners are encouraged to use online giving, drop-off or mail their contributions.
- The latest updates on the coronavirus (COVID-19) as well as all preventative measures can be found on [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
- The Office of Communications and Planning has created and continues to update a landing page at [archstl.org/coronavirus](https://www.archstl.org/coronavirus).

While it is a challenging time, it is not the time to panic. With these precautionary measures, and with the **utmost trust in our Lord**, we move forward in our lives and in our Faith. Let me know if you have questions or concerns, and let us always pray for each other.

Fr. Hecktor