



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH NEWS

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DIOCESE ANNOUNCES CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS

As hospitals and public health officials in Pennsylvania prepare for the potential spread of the coronavirus COVID-19, Bishop David Zubik of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh is calling for precautions within the celebration of Mass in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

This time of year is traditionally a peak season for the potential spread of influenza, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health's most recent update lists statewide influenza activity as "widespread", with confirmed cases in more than half of the regions in the state. Children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune and/or respiratory systems are most at risk.

"It's important to point out that there are no confirmed cases of the coronavirus illness in Pennsylvania. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as local healthcare agencies, are encouraging preparation and precaution as the situation continues to be monitored. A Diocesan Bishop is responsible for promoting, regulating, and being vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese. As such, I am instituting precautions that will serve as preventative steps to help our faith community, and the region as a whole, stay healthy. That is my primary focus," Bishop Zubik said.

The Bishop issued the following directives:

- The distribution of the Precious Blood during the Eucharist is temporarily suspended.
- Holy water fonts should be cleaned and drained on a weekly basis.
- The exchange of the Sign of Peace through physical contact (typically a handshake) is temporarily suspended.
- Those who feel ill are not obligated to attend Sunday Mass. In the interest of the health of your faith community, they should stay home until they are well.

The precautions will take effect immediately and continue as long as deemed necessary by the Bishop. "We will continue to monitor the situation and be ready to make any updates as needed," Bishop Zubik said.

The Bishop is also advising people to be consistent with basic personal hygiene practices outlined in Pennsylvania Department of Health Emergency Preparedness Guidelines (health.pa.gov):

- Cover coughs or sneezes with elbows instead of with hands.
- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Clean surfaces frequently including countertops, light switches, cell phones, remotes, and other frequently touched items.
- If you are sick, stay home until you are feeling better.

In addition to outlining the precautions within Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Bishop Zubik offered this petition to be included during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass:

"For those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness, that they might be healed; for the health professionals taking care of those in need, and that our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence, let us pray to the Lord."