



Catholic diocese limits large gatherings, urges fish fries to go **TAKE OUT ONLY**

March 12, 2020

The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh has cancelled nonessential, diocesan-sponsored gatherings effective Monday, March 16, 2020. Pending further developments, Masses, confessions, religious education and Catholic school classes will continue, with previously-announced coronavirus precautions in place. Parishes are encouraged to do the same. Because this is a fluid and emergent situation, Catholics should expect frequent updates.

Parishes with fish fries are encouraged to become “take-out” only, and to consult local health departments for how to practice take-out hygiene during the pandemic.

Bishop David Zubik sent a letter to all clergy on Thursday, March 12, 2020, outlining five directives. Additional information was sent to clergy announcing specific cancellations including: public listening sessions that the bishop had scheduled for this month, the Arise youth event (which will be rescheduled) and parish assemblies to plan for possible mergers.

The diocesan website has a web page for coronavirus updates, including an email sign-up, at <https://diopitt.org/coronavirus-safety-precautions>. A diocesan Coronavirus Task Force is in consultation with the Allegheny County Department of Public Health and with the national Centers for Disease Control, in order to monitor the situation and use best practices.

Bishop Zubik wrote that the diocese is acting “out of an abundance of caution.”

“As a Catholic faith community, in times of uncertainty our first response is to pray for guidance and grace to meet the challenges of the day,” Bishop Zubik wrote. “In creating policies and procedures related to the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19), we join people from around the world who are working through the same things. As a people of action, our focus will be on what steps we can take to protect all that we love. Working together in our communities, schools, and homes, as we always do, will sustain us through any level of challenge.”

His letter to priests announced that, until further notice, the diocese will operate under these guiding principles:

1. The Eucharist, especially on Sunday, and the sacraments will always be at the heart of our belief, and the faithful need to have access to them to the greatest extent possible. Parishes are to follow diocesan directives regarding hygiene and the celebration of the sacraments. The previous directives are at <https://www.diopitt.org/news/diocese-announces-coronavirus-precautions>.
2. Educating children is essential. We will continue, to the extent possible, to keep our schools and faith formation programs open but will close as is necessary.
3. Parishes, schools and Catholic organizations are to be checking public health websites for direction on hygiene, cleaning of facilities and for other health directives.
4. Nonessential diocesan gatherings are cancelled starting on Monday, March 16, 2020. Parishes, schools and Catholic organizations are encouraged to assess the need for larger gatherings as well.
5. If circumstances warrant, our parishes, schools and organizations should plan for their staffs to telecommute if possible or develop alternate work plans.

The diocese will continue to update all parishioners and the public, as needed. All information, as well as spiritual resources for times of illness, is at <https://diopitt.org/coronavirus-safety-precautions>.