



Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Office for Communications

ARCHDIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON

Media Advisory

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Statement of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Last week, in the early morning hours of Wednesday, May 13th, Fr. Donnell Kirchner, a 79 year-old Redemptorist priest who worked at Holy Ghost parish in Bellaire, passed away. The specific cause of death is unknown, but he had been recently treated at an urgent care clinic who referred him to a hospital emergency room. He was diagnosed with pneumonia, but he was not admitted to the hospital and was sent home with medication. It is not clear if he was tested for COVID-19 at either facility. He returned to the residence he shared with seven other members of his religious order.

Following Fr. Kirchner's death, the other members of the religious order sought medical advice, and all were tested for the coronavirus. Although the parish had followed cleaning, sanitation and social distancing guidelines prescribed by State health officials since reopening on May 2nd, they determined at that time it was best to close the Church immediately to public Masses until the results of their tests were known.

This past weekend, five of the seven members of the Redemptorists religious community learned that they had tested positive for COVID-19, including two priests who had been active in celebrating public Masses at Holy Ghost since May 2nd. As a result of these findings, all Masses at Holy Ghost Church remain cancelled until further notice. The parish and the Archdiocese have also informed the City of Houston Health Department.

While Holy Ghost Church has a seating capacity of approximately 900, in-person attendance at Mass has been closely controlled. Sunday Masses have never exceeded 179 attendees since public Masses resumed on May 2nd and weekday Mass attendance was a small fraction of that amount.

Of course, if you have attended Masses in person at Holy Ghost Church since the reopening on May 2nd, you are strongly encouraged to monitor your health for any symptoms and be tested for COVID-19, as a precautionary measure. There are a number of free COVID-19 testing sites in our community, which can be found by calling the City of Houston Health Department at 832-393-4220 or visiting www.houstonemergency.org/covid19-testing.

While the Redemptorists currently residing at Holy Ghost are asymptomatic, they, and the other members of the community, are in quarantine in the residence isolated from the others.

We ask you to please keep everyone impacted by this illness in your prayers.

*Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston serves 1.7 million Catholics in 10 counties.
It is the largest Roman Catholic diocese in Texas and the 5th largest in the United States.*

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