

In response to information provided by local and state government and health officials today, March 12, 2020, concerning COVID-19, the Coronavirus Disease, Bishop Matano has issued the following guidelines: Concerning Holy Mass in the Diocese of Rochester, the following are to remain in effect until further notice:

1. Catholics who are sick from any illness are asked to stay at home for their own protection and those of others.
2. Any Catholic who feels at risk from exposure to the virus, especially the elderly and most vulnerable, are not obligated to attend Mass. Anyone with concern for his or her health is not obligated to attend Mass.
3. The exchange of the Sign of Peace during Mass is suspended. Also, there is to be no holding of hands during the Lord's prayer or at any other time during Mass.
4. Reception of the Precious Blood from the chalice is suspended. "[The pastors] should instruct the faithful that the Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and hence that as regards the resulting fruits, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any grace that is necessary for salvation." (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, No. 282).
5. Instruction should be given to receive the Sacred Host by avoiding any unnecessary contact. While "the Consecrated Host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant," (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, No 160), Catholics should be strongly encouraged to receive the Sacred Host in the hand rather than on the tongue.
6. Holy water fonts are to be emptied, cleaned and changed regularly. As a further precaution, they may be emptied or removed, if this is judged to be prudent and necessary.
7. Only fresh water is to be used for Baptisms; baptismal fonts are to be cleansed before and after every Baptism.
8. The size of many of our churches and the number in attendance allows for appropriate "social distancing" and the faithful should be advised to sit accordingly. **Note:** Effective 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 13, 2020, the State of New York "will not permit gatherings with 500 people or more.... Additionally, for facilities with an occupancy of 500 or fewer, [the State is] reducing the legal capacity by 50%." Based upon our church's capacities and reported number of those attending Masses, this does not appear to affect many of our parish Masses. If it does, parishes are encouraged to offer an additional Sunday Mass to distribute the number of worshippers more widely.
9. All liturgical ministers should exercise good hygiene, particularly hand washing.
10. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned before and after each Mass, in accord with the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations.
11. Those who are sick and desirous of the Sacraments should have recourse to their priests, exercising prudence and charity. "May priests have the courage to get out, going to the sick to bring them the comfort of God, [and] to bring them the Eucharist." (Pope Francis, Homily from March 10, 2020.)
12. As people of faith, we renew our commitment to pray for God's help and protection for all who are sick, as well as the scientists, health care professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good.