

Dear Friends in Jesus and Our Blessed Lady,

As you well know much has changed around us in the week since I wrote. Governor DeWine has asked us to maintain a practice of ‘social distancing’ to contain the spread of disease. His request is wise and I deeply appreciate his respect for religious worship. I would put it this way – these trying times call for extreme charity. For the sake of the weakest and most vulnerable, we must all act in a way to contain the virus. At the same time, we need to offer our prayers and assistance as best as we can.

The bishops of Ohio met yesterday by telephone and together we are granting a dispensation to all Catholics in Ohio for the next three Sundays (3/15, 3/22, 3/29). To the best of our ability parish pastors and administrators will maintain current Mass schedules, but this is predicated on the availability of our priests – particularly those whose health may become compromised – so it may become necessary to change Mass schedules in our parishes. Should this be the case for your parish, I ask for your understanding and flexibility recognizing that these are extraordinary times. Please check your parish schedule regularly to make sure that the Mass you want to attend is, in fact, being celebrated at the time you are accustomed. It is essential for us that the Mass be offered. That said, I urge all those who are ill, those who might carry the coronavirus or any contagious virus for that matter, and those whose health is compromised by age or other medical conditions, to please to stay home. In a spirit of charity, I also encourage you please to consider carefully your decision to attend Mass and that it might be prudent to stay at home during this time. I remind you that St. Gabriel Radio (AM 820 in Central Ohio, FM 88.3 in Southern Ohio and www.stgabrielradio.com on the web) broadcasts Mass from St. Joseph’s Cathedral (AM Radio) and St. Mary’s in Portsmouth (FM Radio) on Sunday mornings at 10:30 AM. Sunday Masses are also viewable on both WWHO-TV Columbus and WHIZ-TV Zanesville in addition to other cable stations.

Most parish, school and diocesan meetings and activities have been cancelled. The hours will be modified for our Diocesan Pastoral Center in downtown Columbus. Please watch your parish website as well as the diocesan website, www.columbuscatholic.org for updates. If there is a doubt, you should presume cancellation. In all honesty I cannot predict future cancellations

beyond Easter, including First Communions and Confirmations, but we need to be prepared for all possibilities.

We are not in retreat mode by any standard. In fact, your priests and I desire to serve you all the more fervently. Similarly, as Catholics we want to serve the poor and vulnerable even more. We need to imagine new ways to achieve this in order to protect the health and well-being of the very people we desire to serve. Clearly, the situation changes daily and we will try to remain in contact. The Diocesan website will contain a special page with resources for information and prayer. These will include possible resources for families to use on Sundays.

Above all, we must be instruments of hope in the Lord. In his message for the World Day of the Sick (2/11/2020) reminds of the tender gaze of Jesus who, himself became frail, endured human suffering and received comfort from his Father. Let's be strong in our prayer for one another, especially for the sick, their caregivers, those in the medical professions and those entrusted with the charge of care for public health. Be sure of my prayers and deep concern for you.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Brennan