

March 2, 2020

In the midst of the influenza season and with growing concerns regarding the potential spread of the corona/COVID-19 virus in the United States, I want to take this opportunity to encourage all the members of the Diocese of Columbus to take reasonable precautions and demonstrate good judgment in safeguarding their own health and the health of fellow parishioners, those in our schools, diocesan facilities, outreach locations and wherever we interact with the general public.

Our diocesan offices are working with various health officials to stay abreast of the Coronavirus, and for that matter, any public health issue. At present, the message from our public health agencies is to be cautious and aware. If notified by State or County health authorities that further precautions are necessary, I will share that information with you and our offices will work with all concerned in order to take appropriate concerns. In the meantime, please consider the following:

- As always, if you or a member of family are ill, or even experiencing symptoms of illness, you are not obliged to attend Mass. As a matter of fact, in a spirit of prudence and charitable concern for your fellow parishioners please remain home and attend to your own health. If you wish to stay connected in prayer, 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) and St. Mary's in Portsmouth (FM) on Sunday mornings at 10:30 a.m. Sunday Masses are also viewable on both WWHO-TV Columbus and WHIZ-TV Zanesville in addition to other cable stations.
- In that same spirit, we exercise good judgment and concern for others regarding coughing, sneezing, keeping surfaces clean and the shaking of hands.
- NO one should feel obliged to shake hands. While it is the customary form of the greeting of peace, it is not the only form. It is sufficient simply to turn and offer a sincere expression such as "peace be with you" for example.
- All ministers of Holy Communion (ordinary and extraordinary) are asked to take proper measures to practice good hygiene including the washing of hands and the use of hand sanitizing solutions or wipes. In fact, all staff and volunteers should take similar measures.

I want to thank all those who have been taking these measures into account in our parishes, schools and diocesan facilities throughout the influenza season. We will continue to work with local health agencies and update protocols as necessary. We will post information and resource links on our diocesan website and in the Catholic Times.

Most importantly, we pray. Recognizing that there are people suffering far more than we the effects of this virus directly and indirectly, we pray for them, for all charged with public health and all caregivers.