

## **Pastoral instructions regarding COVID-19 preventive measures**

In view of the current context regarding COVID-19, in order to ensure the safety and health of all the faithful and clergy, to conduct pastoral activities in the safest possible environment, the Romanian Catholic Diocese of Canton, Eparchy of St. George in Canton, Ohio, having territorial jurisdiction in the U.S.A. and Canada, considering the provisions of several state and national episcopal conferences in the US and Canada, Issues the following directives:

1. Considering the vast territorial extension of our Diocese/Eparchy and the fact that in some places the danger of infection is more serious than in others, we require that each community take into account the provisions given by the local Roman Catholic hierarchy, so that the obligation to attend the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is dispensed wherever such dispensation is granted by the local Roman Catholic bishop. However, the clergy are not exempt from their duty to pray for the people entrusted to them, even if the local civil or ecclesiastical (Roman Catholic) authorities prohibit the public celebration of divine worship in the territory in which their communities are located. The clergy are expected to act exactly according to these provisions;
2. We encourage all our faithful, clergy included, especially those who are ill or with symptoms of illness or at increased risk of illness to refrain from physical participation at the religious services;
3. Those visiting the sick should take all measures so that these occasions will not cause further contamination;
4. The clergy and all the altar servants, before each liturgical celebration, have the obligation to wash and to maintain cleanliness, taking into account common sense and the potential for infection. The holy vessels and all other objects used in these occasions are to be sanitized after every use;
5. Priests will take care that the particles intended for the communion have a suitable length and consistency so that the distribution of communion by the cleric avoids direct contact the person receiving the Holy Communion.
6. Both the clergy and the laity will refrain from signing themselves with holy water; for this reason, holy water fonts are to be emptied or removed;
7. Both clergy and laity, in churches and/or places of worship, will refrain from kissing and/or touching icons, crosses, relics and/or any object/s of worship. Priests will limit occasional blessings, to the gesture only, without physically touching anyone;
8. Both clergy and laity, at the celebration of religious services will refrain from physical contact (e.g., kissing the hand of the priest, the sign of peace, hugs, etc.), commonly keeping a certain safe distance from each other. (This behavior is recommended even apart from liturgical services);
9. The discipline of fasting and/or abstinence is relaxed, according to each person's situation and location: everyone encouraged to, with a sincere moral conscience, engage in fasting an abstinence without endangering one's personal and/or public health, particularly if one needs to remain at home or is quarantined;
10. It is recommended that parishes stop meetings of any kind, including parish meetings and/ or gatherings, catechism classes, etc.

11. Regarding coffee hours, the priest, together with the community entrusted to him, will decide whether it is appropriate to continue or suspend this kind of activity.

Being aware that the present provisions and indications cannot be exhaustive, we appeal to common sense and wisdom, asking each and every community to comply with the regulations given by the local ecclesiastical hierarchy (Roman Catholic) or by the civil institutions of the State or Province in whose territory those communities are rounded up.

The present provisions shall enter into force immediately and shall remain as it until later civil or ecclesiastical (Roman Catholic) local provisions.

Wishing to highlight that all of these are not only a civil obligation, but also a moral and Christian one, dictated by the common good, the concern for the neighbor and the valuation of life, we urge all our faithful to consider this situation with all seriousness and calmly, praying God to guide us and help us to overcome all these problems with hope.

Prayer of Pope Francis to our Lady, the Healer of the Sick, to implore her protection during the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic:

*O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick. At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith. You, Salvation of the Roman People, know what we need. We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee, joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us: He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen. We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.*