



## Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Chancery Office

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All Priests, Deacons and Employees

**FROM:** Most Reverend George A. Sheltz + *GAS*  
Auxiliary Bishop & Chancellor

**DATE:** March 5, 2020

**RE:** Coronavirus (COVID-19) Precautionary Measures and Preparation

With the latest news of a “presumptive positive” coronavirus case confirmed in Fort Bend County and two new cases in Northwest Harris County, concerns over the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) continue to grow. This memorandum is to inform you of the efforts of the Archdiocese to respond to this global health crisis, as well as to share important information from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Houston Health Department regarding the virus and strategies for slowing its spread.

#### Resources

There are a number of rumors about the virus; therefore, it is critical that we are all educated and informed. The CDC published a Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Situation Summary which provides a detailed overview of the virus, the CDC’s response, a current list of countries with a travel advisory, etc. In addition, the CDC prepared a ‘What You Need to Know about Coronavirus Disease 2019’ fact sheet including the answers to frequently asked questions. Both of these resources were updated on March 3, 2020, are attached for your review.

#### Promoting Healthy Habits

The City of Houston Health Department is recommending the following healthy hygiene habits to limit the spread of respiratory illnesses like COVID-19:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and using hand sanitizer when you can't wash your hands;
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and immediately throwing the tissue away, or using the elbow of your sleeve when a tissue is not available;
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- Staying home when sick and keeping children home when they are sick;
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.

We must be vigilant in adhering to the above recommendations so that we may protect one another and prevent the virus from spreading.

### **Precautionary Measures for Liturgical Celebrations**

In response to concerns expressed by the faithful regarding the virus, Cardinal DiNardo directed all Priests of this Archdiocese to suspend the distribution of Holy Communion from the Chalice until further notice and recommended those receiving the Host to consider receiving it in the hand, rather than on the tongue. In addition, he asked our Priests to remind all persons who are ill they are under no obligation to be present for Sunday Mass and those attending liturgical celebrations to be respectful that some may be uncomfortable with physical contact during times of the Mass, such as the Lord's Prayer or the Sign of Peace.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Task Force**

The Archdiocese has formed a Coronavirus (COVID-19) Task Force to review current policies and procedures, as well as develop new protocols to respond in the event a serious outbreak occurs in our area. The Task Force met earlier this week and is recommending that all of our work locations post the following CDC posters throughout the facilities:

1. *Do Your Part – Slow the Spread of Germs*
2. *Stop the Spread of Germs*
3. *COVID19 Symptoms*
4. *Stay Home if You're Sick*

These posters are important visual reminders of the simple ways in which we can identify symptoms and minimize the spread of the virus.

At this time, the Task Force is not recommending the cancellation of large Church, School or Chancery gatherings or modification of planned business related travel, but will continue to monitor any new developments and make adjustments as determined by a change in circumstances. In the interim, if any individual employee elects for their own personal reasons not to attend a large gathering or travel for business at this time, there will be no adverse consequences for their decision.

You will be provided with updates regarding the work of the Task Force, including any recommendations to prepare you in the event the virus causes a major interruption to our operations. The updates will be disseminated via Chancery Advisory, e-blast and our Archdiocesan website. We also recommend that you visit the websites of the CDC, as well as the City of Houston Health Department, to keep you apprised of the latest information from public health officials regarding the virus.

Please join me in praying for all those who have died or may be currently suffering from the Coronavirus.