

Diocese of Beaumont

Mail: Post Office Box 3948
Beaumont, Texas 77704-3948
Location: 710 Archie Street at Forsythe
Beaumont, TX 77701-2802



Office of the Bishop

Telephone: (409) 924-4310
Bishop Fax: (409) 924-4399
Catholic Pastoral Center Fax: (409) 838-4511
Email: bishop@dioceseofbmt.org

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We have all become very concerned about the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19). This is an emerging and rapidly evolving situation, and the World Health Organization has called it a global health emergency. Every one of us must take reasonable precautions now and not wait until it is too late.

GENERAL PREVENTIVE MEASURES:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyday preventive actions, especially to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, but also other respiratory and contagious diseases:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or cough/sneeze into your elbow sleeve.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or disinfecting disposable wipe.
- Frequently wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with warm soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from the disease. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.

For information and daily updates, go to the CDC's website:

www.CDC.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

LITURGICAL ADAPTATIONS:

In addition to the everyday preventive actions mentioned above, I am issuing these directives (until further notice) as they relate to our liturgical celebrations. Depending on the development of this epidemic, additional precautions may have to be taken. Please check the diocesan website (www.dioceseofbmt.org), the *East Texas Catholic*, and your parish bulletins for updates.

It is imperative that everyone heed these directives and diligently observe these liturgical adaptations IMMEDIATELY.

Out of an abundance of caution, **those who are ill should stay home.** Even under ordinary circumstances, persons who are ill are under no obligation to be present for Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Minimize the risk of exposing others to illness. See the doctor early if symptoms develop.

Clergy (and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion):

1. Practice good hygiene. Wash hands before Mass begins. Use an alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. Use the same hygiene when taking Communion to the sick and homebound.
2. Discontinue the holding or shaking of hands at the Our Father and the Sign of Peace. A bow, a wave, or saying "Peace be with you" are all acceptable expressions.
3. Discontinue the distribution of the Precious Blood at Mass, and distribute Holy Communion only under the form of the consecrated Host. Exchanging the chalice from person to person and drinking from it is an unnecessary risk. *A sacramental reminder:* it is the teaching of the Church that Christ is also fully present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the form of the Host that is distributed at the Mass.
4. Give Holy Communion only in the hand. Discontinue giving Holy Communion on the tongue.
5. To impart a blessing on those in the communion line with arms crossed, simply say "God bless you", without touching the person.
6. After each Mass, thoroughly wash all the liturgical vessels with warm soap and water. [This is expected even in ordinary circumstances.]
7. If continuing to greet parishioners after Mass, avoid handshakes & other bodily contact.
8. Take prudent precautions to enhance the cleanliness and safety in the Church, e.g. door handles, crash bars on doors, counter tops, other surfaces that are frequently touched. Remove or empty holy water fonts. Cover pools of water where parishioners dip their fingers and bless themselves.
9. Frequently check restrooms to make sure they are clean, disinfected, and adequately supplied with anti-bacterial soap and/or alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution.
10. Be alert to updates and/or increased precautions that I will send out to you if the situation worsens. *Distribute these and future directions to your parishioners as soon as possible in the bulletin, at the back of the Church, on your website, and in other methods of communication.*

Parishioners and Others:

1. Observe the above adaptations in liturgical practices until instructed otherwise.
2. Be attentive to the instructions of our public health officials, the CDC, and health providers.
3. Discontinue the holding or shaking of hands at the Our Father and the Sign of Peace. A bow, a wave, or saying "Peace be with you" are all acceptable expressions.
4. Collection counters should avoid touching their faces and wash hands thoroughly afterwards.

Let us pray for those who have died from this coronavirus and for their families. Also pray for all medical professionals and staff who are attending to the sick and dying, and who obviously will face increasing challenges during this epidemic.

This is a time for making sacrifices for the sake of the common good. Perhaps we can learn to translate this fundamental Christian principle to other areas of our lives.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Rev. Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D, D.D.
Bishop of Beaumont