

Regarding COVID-19, the Coronavirus - March 3, 2020
Bishop Michael Duca
Diocese of Baton Rouge

Directives from Bishop Duca that will be put into practice immediately and adhered to until further notice:

Until the Coronavirus threat has passed, I would ask that pastors use pastoral discretion and consider taking the following actions with their liturgical assemblies and ministers:

- Be clear with the congregation that **if s/he is sick, do not come to Mass**. One does not sin if one is ill and is absent from the Eucharist. The person can come back to the celebration of the Eucharist after s/he recovers.
- Temporarily **withhold the Communion Chalice** at daily and weekend Eucharistic liturgies except for the Priest and Deacon.
- Encourage Communicants to **temporarily receive Holy Communion in the hand and not on the tongue**.
- Encourage the liturgical assembly to **refrain from holding hands [unless family]** during the Lord's Prayer and suggest offering the Sign of Peace with a simple bow or a simple wave. Some may be uncomfortable with physical contact during some parts of the Mass.
- Make sure holy water fonts are kept with clean water.
- Make sure your **liturgical ministers wash their hands with soap and water before Mass begins and after Mass ends**. You can encourage your Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in an unobtrusive way as possible to use an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. Tell **any liturgical minister that if s/he is ill to not come to Mass until s/he has recovered**.
- Advise those Extraordinary Ministers **who serve the sick to wash his/her hands before and after each visit**. Use prudent judgement to determine if the sick person is quarantined or not.
- Advise your liturgical assembly to follow these precautions which are the same commonsense hygiene precautions recommended to prevent the flu, including:
 - Avoid close contact with sick persons.
 - Cover mouth/nose with tissue/sleeve when coughing/sneezing.
 - Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing/sneezing.
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth after touching objects.
 - Practice good health habits (clean home, adequate sleep, healthy stress management).

I will continue to monitor the status of the Coronavirus threat to our state and diocese. I am regularly consulting with the Directors of the Office of Worship, Catholic Schools Office, Catholic Charities, Human Resources and the Chancery to assess further actions if required.

Prayers for your welfare.

Sincerely yours,

Bishop Michael Duca+#