March 12, 2020

RE: Coronavirus Update

Dear Brothers in Holy Orders,

As you may know, this afternoon Governor Mike DeWine issued an executive order regarding the avoidance of large mass gatherings, specifically those of 100 or more in a single room or space, to help limit the spread of COVID-19 in Ohio.

Even though religious gatherings are expressly excluded in the order, the Catholic bishops of Ohio, out of concern for the common good and the physical as well as spiritual well-being of the people, have agreed to cooperate with the governor’s direction to create “social distance”. Specifically, beginning immediately and continuing until further notice:

- **Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati are dispensed from their Sunday Mass obligation through the weekend of March 28-29.**
- Masses may be celebrated as currently scheduled with the following restrictions, which should be announced prior to the start of Mass:
  - No holding hands during the Our Father
  - Suspension of exchange of a sign of peace (or instruct the faithful to do so without physical contact)
  - No reception of Holy Communion from the chalice
  - No reception of Holy Communion on the tongue
- Not for penitential reasons, but for health reasons, holy water fonts in the church should be drained.
- Unconsecrated bread and wine for Mass should be kept out of public areas. In other words, they are not to be part of the offertory procession.

Our current general precautions should continue to be followed, specifically:

- **Those who are sick, experiencing symptoms of illness, or are at risk should be strongly encouraged to not attend Mass and, out of charity to their brothers and sisters in Christ, remain at home.**
- Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should practice good hygiene, washing their hands thorougly before Mass begins and, if possible, using an alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution discreetly before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- All vessels should be cleansed thoroughly after Mass with hot, soapy water.
In addition:

- Already-scheduled Confirmations and weddings may proceed as scheduled. If parishes wish to reschedule Confirmations for later in the year, they should contact Fr. Jason Williams, Master of Ceremonies to the Archbishop, at 513-263-3344. Masses of Christian Burial should continue as needed. However, every effort should be made to limit attendance at the ceremony, especially among those who are experiencing health issues or are members of high-risk groups.

- Sacramental preparation events—e.g. RCIA classes, Genesis retreats—may continue at the discretion of event organizers; however, those organizers should exercise sound judgment in deciding to hold such events.

- Non-sacramental parish events or gatherings—e.g. fish frys, athletic contests, youth group meetings—should be cancelled.

If you have questions regarding any of this, please see the guidance on our archdiocesan website (www.catholiccincinnati.org) linked at the top of the home page. There you will also find additional health and safety precautions. Guidance regarding our Catholic Schools has been sent separately to school leaders from Ms. Susan Gibbons, superintendent.

If your parish has live-streaming of Mass, encourage those members of your parish who are not able to attend Sunday Mass to watch online. If your parish does not have live-streaming, encourage parishioners to watch Mass from the Cathedral of St. Peter in Chains Saturday at 4:30 and Sunday at 8:30, 11:00 and 6:00 p.m., available on the archdiocesan website.

Please stay alert for further communication on this changing situation. Let us all continue to observe the precautions prescribed by our public health officials to protect ourselves and those around us, so that we might see the end of this pandemic in the shortest possible time.

Please join me in praying for all who are suffering from illness or disease of any kind, and for an easing of the tension caused by this situation. May Our Lady of Lourdes, mother of the sick, intercede for us, and may the Holy Spirit continue to guide and protect us.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati