



MOST REVEREND JOSEPH R. KOPACZ, D.D., PH.D.
CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

March 9, 2020

Dear Pastors, LEMs, Associates, Deacons, Liturgical Ministers:

There is a long history of combatting virus and disease in our diocese. Consider the many Yellow Fever outbreaks of the 19th century or the 1918 flu that swept across the world. Presently, the coronavirus (COVID-19) is at the forefront of our minds, while the flu also is still affecting many communities as well.

Fortunately, today we have many more options in terms of medical care and communications to help in facing these outbreaks. With this being known, we should be reminded that our response to this current virus and the flu must reflect how we, as compassionate Christians, express our love of God and neighbor.

In caring for all members of our community – especially the elderly and the vulnerable – we are carrying out the mission of the church. We should not panic but move forward in the compassionate mercy that flows from our Savior Jesus Christ with whom we are walking in the desert this Lent.

Therefore, it is with this acute pastoral emphasis and concern for the common good that we issue the following **directives** to all parishes, schools and other institutions in the Diocese of Jackson, effective immediately, until further notice:

- **First and foremost**, for the foreseeable future, I hereby **dispense from the obligation to attend Mass** the elderly and anyone with a serious underlying medical condition for whom contracting the Coronavirus may be a life-threatening situation.
- **To clergy, implement common sense.** If you are sick or have flu-like or virus symptoms do not celebrate Mass. Stay in your rectory or living quarters and seek medical assistance. If you are unable to find a substitute and there is time to alert parishioners, tell them to attend Mass elsewhere on the upcoming Sunday. If you are overcome on Sunday morning, have someone trained to lead a Liturgy of the Word service with possible distribution of Communion if this is feasible. Having parishioners participate in the sacrifice of the Mass is the optimum but we know this is not always possible due to driving distance at the last minute. If Mass is available nearby, parishioners should make every effort to attend that Mass.

- Offering of the **Precious Blood of Christ** is to be **suspended** at all Masses. Be sure to have low-gluten hosts available for those who have an allergy and normally receive only the Precious Blood.
- **Encourage** parishioners to receive the **consecrated host in the hand** if physically possible, if not for their own welfare, out of concern for the health of neighbor but do not refuse someone communion.
- **Before the *Orate Fratres***, encourage those who are feeling ill or those who may have come in contact with someone with flu-like symptoms to refrain entirely from receiving Holy Communion. Instead, as is the practice of the Church, one can make an **Act of Spiritual Communion** at the time others are receiving. Have copies available in the pews of a simple Act in these or similar words: “My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.”
- Parishioners are not to hold hands during the **Our Father**, if that is the practice of the parish.
- The **Sign of Peace** is to be exchanged without physical contact or omit entirely the call to exchange the Sign of Peace.

Intercessions for the Liturgy:

Prayer is an important way Catholics respond to any crisis as we express our dependence on God for all salvation, temporal and eternal. We stand in solidarity with all those impacted by disease including people who are infected, their families, health workers and governments working to slow its spread. Ask parishioners to keep these people in mind while they pray. Specifically, recommend praying the rosary during Lent. Below are sample petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful, from the USCCB:

- For those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness, that they might be healed, and for the happy repose of all who have died from this sickness in recent weeks; let us pray to the Lord.
- For scientists, health professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good in this difficult and uncertain time, that they will be filled with wisdom and understanding; let us pray to the Lord.
- That in times of illness our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence; let us pray to the Lord.
- That our compassionate Father would touch all affected by the current outbreak with healing and peace; let us pray to the Lord.

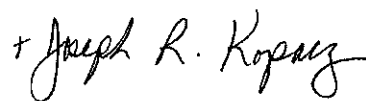
Other practical, pastoral concerns recommended for churches, schools and institutions:

- **Holy Water fonts** are to be emptied, sanitized and remain empty. An exception can be made for people who wish to collect holy water for personal use from the holy water reservoir, provided this reservoir is a closed structure so people cannot place their hands in it.
- Make sure that handrails, restrooms, the tops of pews, doorknobs, etc., are properly disinfected. Have hand sanitizers available near the sanctuary so that all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, deacons and priest celebrants can purify their hands immediately before and after distributing the Eucharist.
- Urge your parishioners, students and staff to stay home if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness. Assure parishioners that they are not obliged to attend Mass in this case. Instead, out of charity they should not attend.
- Consider postponing any non-liturgical, non-essential meetings or gatherings of large groups, especially those that may include the elderly.

We thank you for your vigilance in keeping the faithful safe as well as maintaining the dignity of the Sacred Mysteries. **As Holy Week approaches, we will update these directives as more is learned**, so please check this web page weekly for new items. Other informative web sites include the Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html> and the Mississippi Department of Health: https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420.html.

Asking God to bless all of you and keep you safe from illness, I am

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "† Joseph R. Kopacz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Rev. Joseph R. Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson