



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

237 EAST AMITE STREET JACKSON, MS 39201

JACKSON (March 13, 2020) – As a Church Community we have an obligation to protect the common good and reduce and slow down the spread of coronavirus in order to keep from possible exposure of those vulnerable and from overwhelming our health care system. We all are called to make sacrifices that will benefit others. Sacrifice is a part of our Lenten journey and if one feels inconvenienced or wronged, offer it up for the poor souls in Purgatory and reflect more deeply on the sufferings of our Lord on the Cross.

The Diocese of Jackson staff continues to assess the status of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus across our diocese. Bishop Joseph Kopacz issued a letter on March 9 with the following information:

*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 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.
- **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.

**In addition to the above, these additional directives are in order until further notice:**

- Parishioners are to receive the consecrated host in the hand. **Receiving communion on the tongue is suspended** effective immediately.
- **All School Masses are suspended.**

- **All Healing Masses** for the sick and elderly are hereby **suspended** for the protection of the most vulnerable.
- **Communal reconciliation services are suspended.**
- **All parishes, missions, schools, institutions must implement a disinfection/cleaning strategy** consisting of a crew of people to wipe down all pews, doors, handles, and commonly touched surfaces after each Mass.
- **Offertory collections should no longer be done by passing around the basket or plate** from member to member. Baskets or plates should be placed in a gathering area or entrances of churches for parishioners to place their offertory.
- Those tasked with counting the offertory collection should wear disposable gloves.
- **Holy water fonts should be emptied and disinfected.** Those with a need for this sacramental may bring their own bottle and get Holy Water from the reservoir of Holy Water provided there is a spout on the reservoir. Bottles should not be dunked into the reservoir.

**The following are best practices and suggestions to prevent the spread of coronavirus:**

- Respectfully, but repeatedly, remind people (before Mass, in bulletins, etc.) that if they are feeling ill, they should stay home to avoid spreading the virus (this is good advice year-round).
- Priests, deacons, and Eucharistic ministers are urged to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins and using an alcohol-based antibacterial solution.
- Churches may want to consider offering hand sanitizer at the entrances to help limit the spread of the virus.
- Limit other opportunities for physical contact both before and after Mass (example – greeters should not shake hands with people as they enter or leave church). Greeters and ushers may want to open doors for parishioners to limit contact with door handles.

As of March 12, the **Mississippi State Department of Health recommends avoiding gatherings of 250 people or more and if you do attend, to practice good hygiene and distancing.** Several churches, have gatherings of over 250 people for Mass, our hope is that in these parishes that the dispensation of the elderly and those with serious underlying medical conditions lowers the number of those gathered and that those present disperse throughout the sanctuary.

**As of now, the Diocese of Jackson is not recommending the cancellation of any social gatherings, parish meetings and other functions for youth or adults at our parishes that would have less than 250 people in attendance.**

The diocese recommends following the general guidelines issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a part of everyday preventative actions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or other respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

**The Office of Catholic Education has shared the following information with principals and teachers:**

- **All students, parents, faculty and staff who traveled internationally or went on a cruise during Spring Break, or who had an in-the-home family member who did, are to self-quarantine for 14 days** from the time of return to the U.S.

- **All students, parents, faculty and staff who have traveled domestically, particularly to areas of our country with significant number of diagnosed cases of coronavirus**, including California, Colorado, Washington and New York should also observe the recommended **14-day self-quarantine** before returning to school.
- **Spring Break will be extended by two days for all students of Catholic schools within the Diocese of Jackson**, with plans for classes to resume on Wednesday, March 18. During these two days school administration will work with faculty and staff to create a plan of action moving forward.
- The Office of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Jackson has a Learning Management System that will be implemented for those students on self-quarantine.
- School Masses are suspended until further notice.

**Ongoing updates will be made as Holy Week approaches and as the situation changes. We ask for everyone's cooperation and prayers for all as we navigate these uncertain times.**