



Coronavirus Update March 24, 2020

This document captures the most recent guidance from the Archdiocese of Seattle regarding the coronavirus and steps our communities can take to help prevent its spread. We will be updating this guidance in accordance with recommendations from the Washington State Department of Health and local public health officials.

We continue to track the progress of the coronavirus, which now, according to the World Health Organization, is a global pandemic. Local health officials predict significant spreading if we do not attempt to slow it down – especially in our region, which is the known entry point.

It is with this in mind that Archbishop Etienne announced there would be no public celebration of Mass across the Archdiocese of Seattle. This directive was made for the common good and for the people of God entrusted in our care – many of whom are considered high risk and vulnerable. **We must do our part to slow down this epidemic.**

It is through this framework that pastors will approach decision-making about parish life. We do not want parish life to come to a screeching halt; however, it would be irresponsible of us to gather large groups of people. Instead, we encourage pastors to think about necessary activities and postpone non-essential gatherings – keeping in mind the common good.

In light of the archbishop's directive, people should know that they are temporarily dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until the coronavirus danger lessens and Masses are reinstated. This directive, however, does not close the church, which will be open for private prayer. Please remember to follow all recommendations from Public Health officials to stay home if you're sick, wash your hands frequently, and practice social distancing of six feet within the church.

During this time, pastors will be available for pastoral emergencies, private meetings, anointing of sick, and so on. At the end of the day, we want to ensure we are slowing the spread of the coronavirus and protecting the vulnerable in our community, while also serving the needs of our parishioners.

Below please see additional guidance around how our archdiocese will adjust to help slow the spread of the coronavirus:

Church Hours

We need to ensure that the faithful are able to visit the sacred space of the church for private prayer. The decision to open the church for private prayer is up to the pastor's discretion. In order to open the doors of the church, it is absolutely necessary that the following requirements are met:

- A non-vulnerable individual (staff member or volunteer) must be present any time the church is open. This may require a new schedule where the church is only open a few hours a day, or only on certain days of the week.
- This individual must ensure proper social distancing and must properly sanitize areas that have been touched by parishioners.

If these requirements cannot be met, then the church should direct parishioners to other local Catholic churches that can facilitate this environment. This may require parishes to work together to ensure parishioners have a place to pray on a regional basis.

Please remember the words of Pope Francis as you determine the best way to navigate these complex and sometimes competing factors: "I think of the people who will certainly abandon the Church, when this nightmare is over, because the Church abandoned them when they were in need."

Holy Week Resources for Families

Please know that various chancery offices are working together to provide resources for parishioners to assist them in a faithful and fruitful experience of Palm Sunday and the Sacred Triduum. These resources are forthcoming and will be issued in time for these liturgies. Watch for this information and be ready to pass it on to your families.

Adoration and "Priest Availability" Schedule

Please note that hours for public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (exposition) cannot be published since such an action would constitute an "event" and potentially draw people from their homes (in opposition to the governor's order). Instead, we will publicize the hours the church is open for private prayer.

Similarly, we can no longer publicize hours in which a priest is available at the church for pastoral or sacramental needs. Instead, we must make it very clear how people can reach a pastor for such needs or for a pastoral emergency. Please be sure parishioners know how to reach their priest and schedule an appointment (e.g., confession or anointing) if needed.

Livestreaming Mass and Online Resources

We encourage parishes to livestream daily and Sunday Mass and share online faith resources. This will help your community stay connected and fuel the spiritual needs of your people.

However, this new order means that the non-public Mass must now be a private Mass with one priest and one person supporting with the camera. This Mass may take place in the church, or in a pastor's private chapel provided the space fulfills all liturgical norms. Previously permitted non-public Masses of less than 10 people are no longer allowed.

There are several resources listed on the homepage of the archdiocesan website. Please note that several of the top Catholic publishers are now offering their resources free of charge to help Catholics grow in their faith in the midst of this challenge. These resources ensure that you can continue to evangelize and disciple your parishioners even in the absence of public Sunday Mass.

Anointing and Visiting the Homebound

The governor's order has little effect on our practice of anointing the sick and visiting the homebound, which is an essential ministry that we will continue. Priests must practice an abundance of caution in such circumstances. Please refer to the previously published guidelines for making pastoral and sacramental visits to the homebound.

Food Banks

Many of our parishes operate food banks or food services for people in our communities, which is deemed essential in the governor's order. Therefore, we recommend that parishes continue this important part of our ministry. However, any parish worker or volunteer cannot be a vulnerable person. Each parish will need willing volunteers who are not vulnerable to keep food banks operational during this time. Please see the previously published guidelines for sanitization and social distancing when providing these ministries.

Baptisms and Weddings

This order requires us to postpone all gatherings including weddings and baptisms. The only exception would be for a private baptism when there is a grave danger of death.

Funerals and Cemeteries

Based on the order, all funerals will be postponed. We recommend waiting to schedule a memorial Mass with the family once the ban has been lifted. Similarly, our cemeteries will be closed for burial ceremonies at this time.

Confirmation

In light of the current situation, all confirmation candidates are dispensed from the promulgated requirements this year — especially the retreat. We will proceed with confirmation of candidates based on a pastor's recommendation of each candidate's readiness.

While it's too early to know how this situation will impact upcoming confirmations, we recommend two options:

- Pastors may wish to coordinate with Kimberly in the archbishop's office to reschedule the event later in the summer.
- Confirmation candidates may join with other nearby parishes for confirmations that are scheduled for later this spring. I am sure other parishes will understand the unusual circumstances of this year's situation.

Votive Masses for Various Needs

In accordance with the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM 374), Archbishop Etienne has given permission to priests in the Archdiocese of Seattle to celebrate any of the appropriate Votive Masses for Various Needs on the weekdays of Lent. This is especially relevant for pastors who want to celebrate a Votive Mass for the Sick or Votive Mass for Any Need.

Processions

Processions are only permitted with the permission of the local bishop (Canon 944.1). At this time, no public processions should take place because a procession is an event that gathers people. A procession would draw a crowd and negate the efforts concerning social distancing and protection of the vulnerable in our community.

Staying Connected

We encourage all parishes to look into livestreaming Mass. Our hope is that your parishioners will find livestreaming a useful way to stay connected to you. Also, Archbishop Etienne will start streaming Masses daily at 8:30 a.m. on the Archdiocese of Seattle [Vimeo Channel](#) or on the Archdiocese's Facebook page.

Bells in Solidarity

To demonstrate our solidarity with everyone who is impacted by the coronavirus, we recommend pastors ring their bells at noon. At this time, we ask that you encourage people to pray the Angelus as a family in their homes and conclude with the prayer to Our Lady of Seattle.

The Angelus Prayer (English)

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord. R. Be it done unto me according to thy word. Hail, Mary ...

V. And the Word was made flesh. R. And dwelt among us. Hail, Mary ...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Confession

During Lent, we especially want to offer people the opportunity to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Providing this sacrament is an important and essential way in which we minister the healing and merciful love of God. Even though we are in a heightened health alert state, the conditions do not yet exist for general absolution. Therefore, we will continue to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation on an individual basis only.

By way of reminder, confessions must take place in person. Confessions are not permitted over electronic media including telephones, FaceTime and any other video or teleconferencing means.

To help minimize the risk of exposure, we recommend considering the following actions should anyone be concerned about possible transmission of the coronavirus:

- Temporarily move out of the confessional if it is in a tight space and provide the Sacrament of Confession in a larger room where a confidential conversation can be held.
- If possible, we recommend using a screen to block the air flow between priest and penitent. The penitent should always have the option of confessing their sins anonymously.
- Ensure at least 6 feet of space between the priest and penitent.
- We advise using a chair without armrests or cleansing the armrests with a sanitizer between each person. You may also consider providing this sacrament in such a way that the penitent remains standing so to ensure proper distance while minimizing the surfaces that are touched.

Pastoral ministry for homebound, hospitalized or quarantined

Jesus calls us to be as present as possible to people in these circumstances at this time lest they feel abandoned or isolated in a moment of need. They must know the love of God through us. Let us remember the very clear words of Jesus when he taught us the Corporal Works of Mercy:

“I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.” Matthew 25:26

Our faith requires us to continue the ministry of our Lord Jesus – including anointing of the sick – ensuring that all appropriate hospital protocols are followed. (Check with the nurses station before entering patient rooms if you have any questions). Additionally, we will continue to provide pastoral care to people who are homebound or quarantined.

However, there are key items to consider:

- Any minister who does not wish to carry out this ministry – for whatever reason – may be excused by contacting their supervisor. The supervisor (OVC, Pastor, or parish leader) should ensure another person provides the pastoral care to hospitalized, homebound, or quarantined individuals. This ministry should not cease without notification of superiors and appropriate follow-through.
- It is particularly helpful for all homebound visitors to call ahead to ensure the individual is still accepting visitors. Pro-active communication will help confirm that individuals and families desire such visits.
- It is most important that all home-bound visitors practice the highest sanitary precautions, including excellent hand washing, when carrying out their ministry.

- If you are preparing to visit someone who is showing symptoms – or if you are called to anoint an individual who has the coronavirus in a homebound situation - you must follow these guidelines from Public Health King County to avoid quarantine:
 - You must wear a mask and gloves
 - You must wash hands and use proper gel protocols
 - You must not linger in the room (less than 15 minutes)
 - If possible, wear a gown to cover clothes
 - If you know you will anoint someone with the coronavirus, please reach out to Nick Schoen who can help coordinate the proper Anointing Kit for you. (*See details below.*)
- Any minister who has had *unprotected close contact* with someone who has the coronavirus (*by not following the guidelines above*) must self-quarantine for two weeks and follow the guidelines issued by the Washington State Department of Health: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>
- Ministers may encounter situations where they are denied access to facilities – which is happening at various nursing facilities. In this situation, we recommend calling the individuals directly and sharing the following prayer with them:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most holy Eucharist. 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.

Anointing Kits

This notice is for those priests who may be called on to offer the Anointing of the Sick to any homebound person manifesting possible symptoms of coronavirus. Please read carefully.

We have received good advice from Public Health at King County regarding steps to take for providing the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to people who have Covid-19. However, we have a limited supply of the personal protection equipment they recommend. We are therefore going to select a few priests from each region who will be designated to provide this sacrament in a homebound situation. If you are interested, please contact Nick Schoen who will be providing the training on the proper use of the personal protection equipment that will be included in their “Anointing Kits.” As we get more equipment, we will expand this list of priests, however, we are limiting this to priests who are under age 60 at this time.

Please note, this specific anointing protocol *only applies to homebound people* who are showing signs of the coronavirus or have tested positive for it. Hospitals, nursing homes and adult family homes

already have a clear and effective process in place so priests will not have to self-quarantine after anointing someone with the coronavirus in a hospital setting.

Priest, Deacon or Parish staff become ill

Anyone who feels sick should self-isolate and immediately call their health provider. Essential questions they should ask if they are worried about the coronavirus: Have they had close contact with a person known to have COVID 19? Do they have fever or harsh cough? Please contact Nick Schoen if people on your staff have been exposed and for support in finding backup coverage if needed.

Preparing the Worship Space of the Church

All parishes in the Archdiocese are asked to observe some heightened sanitization and hygiene standards at this time. We are grateful for all the parish staff, volunteers and others who helped prepare and sanitize our churches across the archdiocese. In addition to increased cleaning, we recommend taking the following actions to minimize the spread of viruses and germs:

- Parishioners should make every effort to observe the highest standards of hygiene. That means not touching your face, wiping your nose or cough while in church. If you do, please step out to wash your hands.
- Please remove items that are in common areas and are regularly touched.
- Please remove music books from the pews. These commonly-handled items can serve to inadvertently transmit viruses from one person to the next.
- Please remove paper in the pews (like Pew Art cards or comment cards).
- Should your parish need a deep-cleaning because of a potential exposure, please contact Ed Foster for next steps. We are working with experts to develop coronavirus cleaning procedures, which we will distribute when they are complete.

Remember to Pray

Catholics have always joined together in prayer during times of plague throughout the ages, ministered to the sick, attended to the dying and buried the dead. May we do the same today, loving God and our neighbor. In times like this, we have the opportunity to live out Jesus's command to love God and our neighbor. Let's continue to pray for everyone involved – especially as we continue our Lenten journey.

As Pope Francis reminds us, we should be reaching out to our communities and praying in solidarity with the Church around the world. He said,

“Let us pray to the Lord also for our priests, that they may have the courage to go out and go to the sick people to bring the strength of God's word and the Eucharist and accompany the health workers and volunteers in this work that they are doing.”

Love of Your Neighbor

People will spend more time at home now. Many parishes will begin to use video streaming to provide online Masses. This is also a time for Catholics to manifest Christ's love more than ever. Here are some ideas to show this love:

- Expand outreach by making phone calls to homebound neighbors and local nursing home residents to accompany them in spirit.
- Offer to pray over the phone.
- Offer to go grocery shopping for others who need to stay at home.
- Our homeless neighbors will be encountering more hunger as local restaurants and catering companies begin to reduce the preparation of meals. Increase giving to local foodbanks, Catholic Community Services, and St. Vincent de Paul.
- Consider donating blood or plasma.
- Purchase gas cards for your local nursing home or hospital health care providers and drop them off at the front desk as a thank you gift from the local Catholic church.



Our Lady of Seattle, St. James Cathedral/Photo: Archbishop Paul D. Etienne

Holy Mary, we come before you as spiritual children in great need, seeking your intercession, and asking that your mantle of love surround us to console, protect, and lead us to your son Jesus.

We entrust all of God's family, especially the church in Western Washington, into your immaculate hands. With your son Jesus' gentle power you can *undo any knot* in our church, and in the lives of believers who entrust themselves to your care.

Today I especially entrust to you [*mention request/ Coronavirus here*], and I ask that — through your intercession, and that of St. James, our guardian angels, and the faithful in our archdiocese — we may be free from every spiritual and temporal ill, and be safely led to encounter your son's merciful, sacred heart.

Our Lady of Seattle, Undoer of Knots, pray for us!