Coronavirus Update
March 10, 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.

Parish Ministries and Gatherings other than Mass
We encourage every parish community to closely follow the requests of local health authorities.

At this time, King County, Snohomish County and Skagit County health officials are advising against larger group gatherings. Local (and national) public health authorities have specifically recommended “to avoid large gatherings and events,” especially for people at high-risk, which include people over 60, people with health conditions, people with compromised immune systems, and pregnant women, among others. Out of protection for the people who are at high-risk and to ensure we are doing our part to slow the spread of the virus for the common good, we recommend postponing any large non-essential ministry gatherings and parish events.

Public health applies this to groups larger than 10 people. Non-essential refers to activities like Friday Fish Fries, movie screenings, or mixed group ministry meetings (involving people from diverse backgrounds). It does not apply to liturgical celebrations like Mass, Adoration, Stations of the Cross, or scheduled Confessions and Lenten Penance Rites.

CYO Sports
Since CYO sports involves children, we are following the same guidance for Catholic Schools, which is following the recommendations from Public Health King County and Seattle Public Schools. At this time, Seattle Public Schools has begun canceling large group events including competitions. Due to this, we will be canceling our Volleyball and Basketball games in King and Snohomish Counties for this upcoming weekend.

However, since Seattle Public Schools has not recommended wide spread closure of schools at this time, we believe our parish communities may continue offering CYO practices in their own gym. This would allow student athletes to continue playing and learning the sport, but in an environment that mimics the school day and does not bring together large groups of people. For this, we rely on...
the discretion of the principal and pastor to make the decision for their community – given the rapidly changing nature of local public health recommendations.

At this time, CYO Baseball is scheduled to kick-off this weekend. Since this is an outdoor sport, we will move forward with the season opening this weekend and will monitor guidance from local public health regarding outdoor sports like this.

**Sunday Mass**

Until we are mandated to do so by government officials, we will continue to publically celebrate Sunday Mass throughout the Archdiocese of Seattle. Please urge people who don’t feel well, who are caretakers or considered to be “high risk” to stay home. This includes people who live with a vulnerable individual. This is an opportunity to explain to people that any person who self-selects to stay home from all public gatherings and activities (including Mass) for reasons of coronavirus concern is temporarily dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass until the coronavirus danger lessens. The normal obligation to attend Sunday Mass will resume when they re-engage in other public gatherings or activities. This dispensation extends to those who are ill, a caretaker or considered to be high risk of getting sick. Please see the separate list of resources that you can share with them so they can remain active in their spiritual lives when they cannot participate in Sunday Mass.

**Communion in the Hand**

This is an excellent opportunity to catechize how one reverently receives Communion in the hand by preparing a worthy throne for our Lord. Some people may have concerns about receiving Communion in the hand. It is important that their concerns be addressed pastorally and clearly. We are not refusing Communion to anyone. In an effort to do our part to contain the spread of a new virus, while at the national epicenter of the outbreak, we are limiting the option at this time to receive Communion in the hand. People are free to either receive Communion under this new temporary guideline or not. This requirement is being enacted out of our love and care for the most vulnerable in our midst. It may be important to remind concerned parishioners that the greatest divine law is that we love God and our neighbor. All other laws and individual rights are subordinate to that supreme divine law.

**Blessed Sacrament Reverence**

Some concerns have been expressed regarding the handling of sacred vessels. During this time of increased attention to cleanliness, we must always uphold our reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. Here are the necessary procedures to be always observed concerning the sacred vessels.

- Sacred vessels for both the Hosts and Precious Blood must first be purified by a priest or deacon. Only after the sacred vessels have been purified may sacristans further clean them. Please take care to observe that this procedure by the proper minister (priest or deacon) is being observed. Please contact the Liturgy Office for any questions.
- Under no circumstances are the Eucharistic Species ever to be disposed of in any manner. The Eucharist under either form (Host or Precious Blood) is only to be consumed with reverence. If there are any questions regarding the proper handling of the Eucharist, please contact me for guidance. *(Also see Canon 1367)*
**Baptism**
All parishes in the Archdiocese of Seattle are asked to observe some temporary practical norms concerning the Sacrament of Baptism until the coronavirus is contained.

While baptisms are not commonly celebrated during Lent, they are still possible based on pastoral urgency. However, in order to limit any potential spread of germs or virus to a vulnerable population, we recommend against any “immersion” baptisms. Instead, please use fresh water that has been blessed for the Baptism and immediately drain it after the baptism. If there are several babies or people who will be baptized, do not reuse the same water. Have a pitcher or basin with enough freshly blessed water in it to pour on each person’s head.

**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.

We understand the concerns around the tight space of a confessional. 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.

If any of your parish staff express concern or feel vulnerable for whatever reason, you need to allow them to work from home. They should be paid their regular salary, even if remote work is not possible. Should this last a few weeks, there may be a need to ask a bookkeeper or volunteer to come in to ensure essential work, such as paying bills, is not neglected.

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 for Mass last week. In addition to increased cleaning, we recommend taking the following actions to minimize the spread of viruses and germs:

- Join the Property & Construction webinar on facilities work practices related to the Coronavirus this Thursday, March 12th at 9am. Please use the following link to join the webinar: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2382898289065912587
- Parishioners should make every effort to observe the highest standards of hygiene. That means not touching your face, wiping your nose or cough during Mass. If you do, please use a cloth or tissue and step out of Mass so to carefully wash your hands.
- Ask all Eucharistic Ministers to discretely leave to wash their hands during the Offertory. This ensures their hands are clean prior to Communion.
• Priests and deacons should observe the highest hygienic standards at all times prior to and during the celebration of the Mass.
• 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).
• Please do not hand out paper Order of Worship guides that are reused at other Masses. Either print guides for single use – or go without the paper Mass guide.
• Ask ushers to only use a collection basket on a stick, which limits the number of hands touching the basket. If your parish does not have such a basket, ask your parishioners to drop their collection into a stationary basket, held by an usher, on their way out of Mass or encourage your parishioners to enroll in the parish’s EFT or online giving program.
• Ask all money counters to wear disposable gloves for collection counts.
• 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.”

In solidarity with the Pope and Catholics around the world, we offer these Prayers of the Faithful:

• For all those around the world suffering from the coronavirus, especially in the countries of China, Korea Italy, and Iran, that they may receive strength and healing form the hand of Christ and compassion and ministry from the Church.
• For health workers and volunteers around the world who are on the front lines treating patients and their families, that the Lord will protect them from harm as they minister the Lord’s healing and compassion for others.