



Updated Directives on COVID-19 for Immediate Implementation

March 17, 2020

Dear Fathers:

With the spread of COVID-19 accelerating and more stringent measures being recommended by the CDC and other civil authorities, Bishop Rhoades has issued the following directives, effective immediately.

1. **All public Sunday and weekday Masses are suspended, effective March 18th, until further notice.**

All Catholics in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass while this suspension is in effect. (TV Mass and live-stream online options can be found at <http://www.diocesefwsb.org/covid-19>.)

2. At the present time, parish churches should remain open for private prayer and adoration of the Lord in the tabernacle. There should be no “scheduled” services that would bring people together at a specific time. These include services of Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

In addition:

- Drain holy water fonts and keep them empty, since water is a vector for transmission of this coronavirus.
- Ensure that routine environmental cleaning is done of all frequently touched surfaces (including pew tops, church doors, etc.).
- Ensure that handwashing facilities and supplies are available and properly stocked in parish restrooms.
- Consider making hand sanitizer available for all visitors.

SACRAMENTS & OTHER LITURGICAL RITES:

1. At the present time, baptisms, weddings, and funerals may proceed, but attendance is to be limited to immediate family and necessary participants (and only if they have not exhibited symptoms of COVID-19).
2. **Baptisms:** Regarding the celebration of Baptism, it is recommended that the water be blessed in an individual vessel and then poured over the candidate into the font. Fresh water should always be used and then discarded properly afterwards. Baptisms should not be done by immersion.



3. **RCIA:** Those preparing to receive the sacraments and enter the Church this Easter or in the following weeks will still be permitted to complete that process at an appropriate time once the pandemic has eased. The bishop has dispensed the elect from the preparatory rites for initiation.
4. **Confession:** Penance services are prohibited and confession times should not be scheduled. Priests should hear confessions of people who ask to receive the sacrament.

For individual confessions, it is recommended that some distance (six feet, if possible) should be kept between priest and penitent. Confessions may be heard outdoors. If indoors, it is recommended that the room be large enough to maintain some distance. Whether indoors or outdoors, the secrecy of the confession must be maintained. No one else should be near enough to hear the confession.

5. **Pastoral Care of the Sick:** The protocols and directives of hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities must be followed in pastoral visits to the sick, including the use of masks, gloves, or gowns. The same or similar precautions should be taken when visiting the sick in their homes, especially if the sick person has, or is suspected to have, the COVID-19 virus. In such cases, the priest may use a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball in anointing the sick person. The cotton should be burned or buried after use. In pastoral visits to the sick, proper precautions should be taken in hearing confessions and giving Holy Communion. Hands should be washed or sanitized thoroughly before and after all visits to the sick. Priests are to follow the directives of our local and state health officials when ministering to persons with the COVID-19 virus. Keep in mind that quarantine may be required if the proper protocols are not followed.
6. **Weddings and Funerals:** At this time, weddings and funerals may be celebrated within or outside Mass, but are not open to the general public. The precautions previously mandated for Masses (with some adjustments) remain in effect, namely:
 - a. Enact "social distancing" measures insofar as possible, whereby a distance of six feet is maintained between all individuals who are not part of the same family. To the extent possible, the assembly should be asked to sit in alternating rows.
 - b. Keep the vessels containing the bread and wine covered until they are brought to the altar. It is recommended that the person responsible for preparing the gifts before Mass wear a mask and non-latex gloves, and carefully wash his or her hands prior to touching the hosts and pouring the wine. Gift-bearers should not be utilized; rather, the vessels should all be placed on the credence table. The person responsible for the care of the vessels after Mass is to ensure that they are thoroughly cleaned. After being purified according to the rubrics, Mass vessels are to be washed with hot, soapy water.



- c. Discontinue the use of missalettes and hymnals, since studies indicate the virus can survive on such surfaces for hours or even days. They should be removed from the pews during this pandemic. Worship aids, if used, should be printed for each occasion and then destroyed.
- d. The Sign of Peace should not be given by the customary handshake. It could be exchanged without physical contact; for example, by a bow of the head and greeting of peace. Or it can be omitted altogether. All are asked to refrain from holding hands during the Our Father, if this is a custom.
- e. Only the priest should distribute Holy Communion since an extraordinary minister is not needed with the small congregation. He should use hand sanitizer before and after distributing Communion.
- f. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the faithful remains suspended.
- g. Receiving Communion on the tongue remains an option, but may be discouraged since there is an increased risk of contamination. Special care should be taken not to touch the tongue or mouth of the communicant. If the priest would touch the tongue or mouth of the communicant, he should purify his fingers and wash or sanitize his hands before continuing with Communion.
- h. Communion in the hand is also a potential means of transmission, so every effort must be made to avoid hand-to-hand contact. No physical contact should be made with a communicant who comes forward for words of blessing.

*** If there has been a local escalation of COVID-19 with particular implications for your parish and you need immediate guidance on a course of action, please contact Fr. Mark Gurtner at mgurtner@diocesefwsb.org**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian MacMichael".

Brian MacMichael

Director, Office of Worship
260-399-1426