

March 24, 2020

Dear Fellow Clergy and Parish Life Coordinators,

I hope this finds all of you holding up okay. I want to begin by thanking all of you for the work you have done and continue to do trying to minister to the people of the archdiocese in the difficult time. Our current crisis has created a great deal of uncertainty in the lives of our people, and no clear indication as to when this will run its course. I appreciate your own commitment and witness. Know of my prayers for you and for all those entrusted to your care.

In the seven days since we first sent out the announcement suspending the celebration of the Mass as well as all other public liturgical services and gatherings of the faithful, I have spoken with a number of you. This has helped identify a number of areas for clarification and concern. Some of those were addressed in the subsequent memo that was sent last week. I appreciate your patience and wish to offer some further clarifications here.

Behind all of the directives issued by the archdiocese these past several days is the strong conviction that we have a responsibility to encourage people to stay at home and limit contact with others. In our conversations with medical and civic leaders it has been made very evident that we are in a particularly critical moment in trying to limit the spread of this virus. This has been reinforced by the governor's recent proclamation of his executive order that all people stay at home.

In response, Archbishop Charles Thompson has directed that the following instructions be communicated, as well as the attached statement addressing questions on the sacrament of penance and pastoral care of the faithful prepared by Fr. Beidelman.

- The Holy Father has encouraged all Christians to pause at 12:00 noon, March 25<sup>th</sup>, Eastern Time, to pray the Our Father in response to the Coronavirus.
- Given the need to encourage people to remain in their homes, particularly the most vulnerable, no public gathering of the faithful should take place at this time. This includes gatherings that take place outside or in parking lots, even if people remain in their cars. This would include celebration of Mass by loudspeaker or FM transmitter, distribution of Holy Communion in the parking lot or in cars, drive up confessions, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, or even gatherings for prayer and the rosary. We certainly encourage the creative ways of offering prayer and sustaining a sense of community via social media and other forms of communication.
- All churches and gathering spaces are closed and should not be left open for private prayer or gatherings.
- While the needs of individual parishes are varied, pastors are encouraged to limit the presence of office staff to those who are necessary for the care of the people and the regular maintenance of parish facilities. If it is possible for staff to work from home, that is encouraged. When staff do need to be brought together, all precautions concerning social distancing should be taken into account.

- Reception of Holy Communion should only be offered in the context of Viaticum for those in danger of death. Out of concern for the health of our homebound, deacons and the lay faithful should not make pastoral visits to the homebound or those in health care communities. Holy Communion should not be brought to the faithful in their homes outside of the giving of Viaticum.
- Ministries and societies concerned with service to the poor, such as St. Vincent de Paul and food pantries are to remain active wherever possible. Care should be taken to adopt protocol and procedures to protect both clients and those involved in these vital ministries. Further guidance will be provided by Catholic Charities
- Because of the suspension of public Masses, the pastoral necessity for priests to celebrate as second or third Mass on a Sunday is no longer in effect. Therefore, the expectation is that a priest will celebrate only one Mass on a Sunday, and may celebrate a vigil Mass on Saturday, provided that this is the only Mass celebrated on that day.
- Should a priest have multiple intentions for Masses on a single day, those intentions may be combined at the sole Mass of the day, with the consent of those who requested those intentions. Otherwise, other Mass intentions should be rescheduled. A reminder that a priest must celebrate a pro populo Mass every weekend. However, this may be combined with other intentions. Also, a priest may only accept one stipend per day. (Motu proprio: *Mos iugiter*, 1991)
- The most recent developments mean that the previous policies on funerals and weddings remain in effect. With growing uncertainty and the need to protect the health of others, weddings in particular should be postponed or rescheduled if possible to a later date. Any exception to this should only be offered after consultation with Fr. Eric Johnson or Fr. Pat Beidelman.
- We would encourage our brothers who are vulnerable themselves either because of age or because of health to consider reaching out to other priests to provide sacramental assistance for those who have an immediate need.
- Finally, please let us know if you're sick. Take care of yourself and contact a medical professional if you are in need.

Thanks again for your patience and your ministry. A guidance document for Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum should be out in the next day or so. We will also be distributing other clarifications or directives as they arise. In the meantime, feel free to contact either me or Fr. Beidelman with any questions. May God bless and keep you.

Peace,

Fr. Eric Johnson