



Memo

Date: March 16, 2020

To: Priests, deacons, sisters, chancery staff, partner agencies and parish communicators

From: Most Reverend Joel M. Konzen, SM, Diocesan Administrator

Re: COVID-19 update March 12

Dear Friends,

After discussions with medical experts, health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and pastors and worship offices, we are putting these conditions in place to address the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 virus in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Some of these have already been instituted. Others are being added at this time.

Holy Mass: People who are ill should not attend Mass, but they can still participate from home by watching a televised or broadcast Mass. Remind your parishioners, if they are sick or if they are the caretaker for someone who is sick, their obligation to attend Mass is dispensed. This applies to every illness, not just COVID-19. Influenza, strep, and other viruses are always present in our communities and we should be mindful of the threats these illnesses pose to our community. At the bottom of the memo, there are resources of parishes that offer video Masses.

Visits to the Homebound: In-person visits to the homebound and elderly should be discontinued for the time being. This includes visits to healthcare, nursing, and assisted living facilities. Encourage your ministers to call their neighbors by phone or video conference, but not to put them at risk of exposure by visiting. The ministry of presence is an important one, so it may be

time to get creative about how we visit with those who are in need of company. The [CDC has recommended using a “buddy system”](#) in which specific ministers are assigned to check on specific people by phone or video conference to make sure no one is excluded from care. Pastors should consider pastoral needs and use common sense in approaching cases of extreme need or grave illness.

PSR/CCD, Youth Ministry, and Faith Formation: Each parish must make its own decision about offering classes of any kind, based on exposure and infection rates in their local community. We recommend deep-cleaning all classrooms and gathering spaces every time they are used. The CDC has practical [guidelines here](#) for schools and daycare centers. If a parish has a school attached, and the school has to close because of exposure, classes should be suspended for the time the school is closed. If there is no school attached to a parish, but a case is identified in your community and/or your local school system is shut down, you should consider suspending classes, cleaning and seeking input from your county or city health department on how long to remain closed.

Large Gatherings/Events: Neither the CDC nor Georgia Department of Public Health has issued any advice against large gatherings as of the afternoon of March 12. The Archdiocese of Atlanta will continue to monitor these agencies, as should parishes and schools. It would be wise to remind people in the high risk group that they should carefully consider attending any large group or public events at this time. They should consider local exposure and infection rates as well as their own health status.

Smaller Gatherings/Events: Again, our public health agencies have not issued guidance on gatherings as of March 12. Each pastor needs to assess these events based on what it is happening in his local community. We are blessed to have parishes and missions spread across much of the state where conditions can be very different. As with larger gatherings, you should encourage your high risk population to consider if they should participate.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta will provide a COVID-19 link on the [homepage](#) of the website to post updates on advisories from the Office of the Archbishop. This webpage will be provided soon. Updates will be posted regularly as the situation continues to evolve. We recommend you monitor national and local health agencies for more timely updates on the spread of this virus and follow the recommendations of health agencies as we move forward.

Please join me in prayer for our world. We ask through the intercession of the Blessed Mother for a swift end to the spread of this illness, comfort for all those affected, and wisdom for all those who must respond to this in any way.

In Jesus and Mary,

Most Reverend Joel M. Konzen, S.M.
Diocesan Administrator

Further Materials

- The CDC has a webpage with many useful resources on prevention:
<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html>.
- For daily updates on COVID19:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- Downloadable posters and handouts you can use in your parish or school:
<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>
- Hand washing technique resources:
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>
https://www.cathdal.org/handwash?fbclid=IwAR3XNAF6fikDgXVIja88bFJ8fiJ9n3f_3m4Qud56wzu0jJjSkWLSk8Fkbk
- Downloadable and printable handwashing fact sheets:
<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/fact-sheets.html>