



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: Coronavirus update March 13

Dear Friends,

During Lent we are called to live the gospel of Jesus Christ more fully. The COVID-19 outbreak has challenged us to discern ways to increase our outreach to one another, while at the same time exercising greater prudence in the ways in which we render Christ-like care. We all need to be present to those on the margins who may be fearful and vulnerable right now. The mission of the Church continues, even if it looks a little different than before.

Recognizing the grave cause of the current public health emergency, I dispense all the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Atlanta and all Catholics currently in the Archdiocese of Atlanta from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass for the weekends of March 14-15; 21-22; and 28-29. This decision was made with input from the priests who comprise the archdiocesan College of Consultors and senior staff.

We also wish to update some other pastoral guidelines. Some of these have already been instituted. Others are being added AS OF SATURDAY, MARCH 14. For continuing updates on how the Archdiocese of Atlanta is responding to COVID-19, visit our website, <https://archatl.com/>.

Holy Mass: Even without the present dispensation, people who are ill should not attend Mass, but they can still participate from home by watching a televised or broadcast Mass. The faithful can also make an act of spiritual communion. At the bottom of the memo, there is a list of parishes that offer video Masses as well as resources for spiritual acts of communion.

Adoration, private prayer and Reconciliation: Penance services should be canceled, but individual confessions may continue as usual. In place of the penance service, you may wish to increase access to individual confessions. Opportunities for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and private prayer should continue to be available. Please ask those in high risk groups to carefully consider whether they should attend. Please ask people to practice “social distancing” techniques such as remaining a few feet away from others and not shaking hands or embracing. We recommend deep-cleaning all gathering spaces every time they are used. The CDC has practical cleaning [guidelines here](#).

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 prudential judgement in approaching cases of extreme need or grave illness.

Catholic Schools: Archdiocesan schools will be closed from March 16 through March 27. Schools are scheduled to reopen on Monday, March 30, subject to review due to this rapidly changing situation. Contact your local school for information on virtual or at-home learning.

PSR/CCD, Youth Ministry, Faith Formation, and other gatherings: Every attempt should be made to curtail or postpone non-essential gatherings. 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. 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 Administrator. 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