



OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

Memorandum

To: Priests and Deacons
From: Bishop William M. Joensen, Ph.D.
Date: March 3, 2020
Re: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Inquiries have been made in recent days about the Diocese's liturgical recommendations regarding the global coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. As of this writing, there have yet to be any reported cases of the virus in Iowa, yet there is general public concern. The CDC has stated that the precautions to be observed for coronavirus are the same as those for the flu. Last December, the Worship Office sent out a memo with recommendations for dealing with the flu. Presently, recommendations for coronavirus reflect those recommendations, namely:

- Those who are sick should be (as always) encouraged to stay home from Mass and reminded that there is no “sin” in doing so—and, in fact, it represents an act of charity for the entire parish.
- Good hygiene should be practiced by all in attendance, congregants, and ministers alike. There is no greater prevention of infection than the thorough washing of hands.
- The use of hand sanitizer by the ministers of Holy Communion before distribution to the faithful is obligatory.
- Continued distribution of the chalice to the faithful is left to the prudential judgment of the pastor. It is recommended that an explanation to the faithful be given as to the fact that reception of Holy Communion under either species is full Eucharistic communion with Christ. Distribution from the chalice at institutions of care should by now be suspended.
- Those who feel unwell should be encouraged to refrain from receiving from the cup (if the practice is continued).
- The Sign of Peace may likewise be suspended at the prudential judgment of the pastor, or may be substituted with a visual sign.
- It is already essential that, in addition to the ritual purification of vessels, the vessels for Holy Communion should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after each Mass.
- Holy water fonts should be regularly cleaned.

Given the present lack of cases in Iowa, at this juncture more serious measures such as requesting the faithful not to receive on the tongue, proscribing distribution from the chalice across the Diocese, or even cancelling Mass in general are not merited. Other guidelines and more broadly applicable diocesan policies and procedures will be issued and communicated as the situation warrants.