



Bishop Parkes Issues New Temporary Directives in Response to Coronavirus Concerns

In light of new concerns over the spread of the novel coronavirus and because of our Church's fervent respect for the dignity and value of human life, Bishop Gregory Parkes has issued three new directives to protect the health and safety of churchgoers in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Effective March 12, 2020, the following directives will remain in place until further notice:

1. **The communal distribution of the Precious Blood from the cup will be temporarily suspended. Our faith teaches us that we receive the fullness of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Consecrated Host.**
2. **All Holy Water fonts will be emptied, including the baptismal font.**
3. **Hand-to-hand and any other physical contact is to be avoided, including at the Sign of Peace.**

As a reminder, individuals should stay home from Mass, church activities and school if they are feeling sick, have a family member who is sick or have an immune system that is compromised. It is an act of charity to prevent the spread of a disease. It is not a sin to miss Mass if you are ill, coughing or have other symptoms related to coronavirus or other illnesses.

Bishop Parkes continues to encourage parishioners to consider reverently receiving the Body of Christ in the hand, rather than on the tongue.

In addition, the following guidelines have been issued, as a supplement to the original diocesan guidelines of March 2, 2020:

Communion to the Sick and Homebound:

For the protection of our more vulnerable members, please be sure that all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion observe the following procedures when bringing Holy Communion to the sick:

1. Do not visit people if you do not feel well.
2. Call ahead of time to make sure the communicant will be available and can take visitors. If they are not feeling well, postpone the visit to a later date when they are feeling better.
3. Refrain from physical contact when visiting.
4. Before giving Holy Communion be sure that you have washed your hands with soap and water and/or use a hand sanitizer (60% alcohol content) and then wash or sanitize your hands afterwards.
5. Do not linger in your visit.
6. Regarding nursing homes, Assisted Living Facilities or hospitals, many of these institutions are already closing their doors to visitors. You may need to contact the facility ahead of time to see whether they will allow the visit by the EMHC and then follow their protocols.

Holy Week:

Holy Week (Passion/Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday) is a time when your parish will likely have many visitors. Prior to each liturgy, be sure to advise the assembly about the liturgical protocols that are in place. The only recommendation at this time is in regard to the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday (April 10). Prior to the veneration, the celebrant should advise the assembly that a reverent bow before the cross is an appropriate gesture rather than a kiss or touching the cross.

Prayer and Fasting:

Prayer is an important way for Catholics to respond to any crisis as we express our dependence on God. We pray especially for all those who are ill, their families, health care workers and officials working to slow the spread of COVID-19. Bishop Parkes urges the faithful to pray and fast for a quick and positive resolution of the current pandemic and for compassion and kindness to prevail in the hearts of all as we care for those in need. The following prayer is adapted from the *Roman Missal* and may be shared with your parishioners:

***Almighty ever-living God, eternal health of believers,
hear our prayers for your servants who are sick with coronavirus:
grant them, we implore you, your merciful help,
so that, with their health restored,
they may give you thanks in the midst of your Church.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.***

A Note Regarding Travel Advisories:

Please review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notices regarding travel available here.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Next Steps

Bishop Parkes and his executive staff are monitoring communications from the CDC. They are prepared to take additional steps, if necessary, to protect the health and safety of parishioners, employees and students.

To read the guidelines that were distributed on March 2, 2020, please visit
<https://www.dosp.org/coronavirus/>