



Directives to be Followed in the Fall River Diocese in Response to the Coronavirus Crisis

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Bishop of Fall River
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Following the World Health Organization's declaration of the Covid-19 crisis as a pandemic and the declaration of a state of emergency in Massachusetts by Governor Charles D. Baker, many people have contacted us to express their concerns and ask what we, as a Church, are doing to help prevent the spread of this virus.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River, it is my responsibility to *"promote, regulate, and be vigilant over the liturgical life of his diocese"* (General Roman Missal). The coronavirus is now part of our public life--our world, our country and our state. Even though, as of this date, there are no known cases of anyone infected by this virus in the territory of our Diocese, together we must call on faith and reason to be vigilant and proactive to prevent the spread of this virus.

Following the guidance of public health officials, I have issued directives for the Catholic community of our Diocese. These will be updated as needed. I anticipate further communication next week detailing any additional steps we may need to take in response to this evolving situation.

I am directing our priests, deacons, lay ministers and faithful to observe the following:

1. As of today, March 13, 2020, we will continue the public celebration of daily and Sunday Masses, allowing our faithful to turn to prayer and faith in this difficult time;
2. Those at particular risk by reason of age or underlying health conditions, or anyone who may be feeling ill, **are excused from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass**. We encourage them to watch Mass on TV or via live streaming on the internet and to pray at home. Please visit www.fallriverdiocese.com for listings;
3. During this time of public health concerns, we are temporarily suspending distribution of Communion of the Precious Blood of Christ with the chalice. Communion will be given only under the form of bread (Host) – except for those with Celiac disease who are already receiving Communion from a separate chalice;
4. We are also directing that Communion be given only on the hand and **not** on the tongue;
5. The Sign of Peace during the Mass is to be replaced by a moment of quiet prayer or by wishing peace **without** physical contact;
6. Holy Water Fonts must be emptied, cleaned and remain empty;
7. Non-essential gatherings in parishes such as dinners, lunches, and other social events should be postponed or canceled;
8. Pastors should encourage parishioners to practice social distancing. The CDC recommendation is to keep a 6 to 10 foot distance between people.
9. When gathering for liturgies and devotions, pastors and parishioners are urged to follow carefully the recommendations which were previously sent to all parishes;
10. I would strongly recommend that each parish and school be diligent about keeping ALL areas sanitized and to reference the "Catholic Mutual ...CARES" document for additional guidance.

We are all invited to join in fervent prayer for those affected by this health crisis – those who have been infected by the virus, their families, caregivers and health providers.