ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY
GUIDELINES FOR LITURGY DURING THE
CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

These Guidelines are based on the various documents issued by the USCCB, Catholic Mutual Group Insurance, the US Government (CDC) and other dioceses or Bishops’ Conferences such as the CBCEW. These Guidelines provide a summary for use in the RC Diocese of Albany, especially for parish worship and events.

The Liturgy, Parish Events and Coronavirus: Important Steps and Precautions

The guidance below is given in stages, which will be stepped up if, or when, the situation changes in the USA, or in our local region. The movement to another stage would be indicated by statements from official institutions such as the CDC and/or by the Diocese. Any actions under one of the stages would be in operation until further notice. The aim of these Guidelines is to provide a practical and measured response and guidance.

Efforts locally and nationally are focused on containment of the virus and the advice in this document is written for those circumstances. If the situation changes, detailed guidance will be produced and communicated. The Guidelines will, of course, be kept under continuous review.

Useful sources can be found at the USCCB website and www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019

General Points:
The CDC recommends everyday preventative actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses such as Coronavirus:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow vs. your hand (you can spread germs when touching items after coughing or sneezing into your hand).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow the CDC’s recommendations for using a facemask.
  - The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases including Coronavirus.
  - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of Coronavirus to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.
- Wash your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds before eating, blowing your nose, coughing, and sneezing. If soap and water is not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
STAGES (the particular stage will be determined by official, medical/governmental advice and indicated on the Diocesan website)

Stage 1: Very few cases in USA, no known cases in local parishes in the Diocese. The recent memorandum from the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship (2/28/20) gives two, fundamental principles:

- Ensure everyone (priests, deacons, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion etc.) maintains good hygiene (we should be doing this already, not least in the flu season) especially at Mass and parish gatherings. The best way of protecting us from spread is for everyone to use universal good hygiene, which will effectively disrupt spread of the virus.
- Assure the faithful that if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness they are not obliged to attend Mass, and even out of charity they ought not to attend

Following these principles, key actions for the parish to take would be:

1. Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from the physical sign of peace, taking communion from the Chalice and advise they should receive the host on the hand only. (We should be doing this anyway, every ‘flu season.)

(Note: Concern has been raised over whether the sharing of the cup at Holy Communion contributes to the spread of the flu and any other contagious disease. The best information available regarding the risk of transmission of disease from the use of a common Communion cup is that the risk is “very low.” A report by the Center for Disease Control published in the American Journal of Infection Control stated that “the risk for infectious disease transmission by a common communion cup is very low, and appropriate safeguards—that is, wiping the interior and exterior rim between communicants, use of care to rotate the cloth during use, and use of a clean cloth for each service—would further diminish this risk.” Nevertheless, the CDC advises that persons with an “active respiratory infection, e.g., a cold or flu,” should refrain from receiving from the common cup/chalice.)

2. Ensure good regular cleaning of surfaces lots of people touch regularly, including such things as door handles

3. Ask everyone attending Mass to sanitize their hands as they come into church using sanitized gel dispensers (make these available in porches or entrances).

4. Ensure ministers of the Eucharist sanitize their hands before and after distributing communion (we should be doing this anyway as a matter of course.) This can be done by washing hands thoroughly (for 20 seconds at least with soap and water) discreetly before proceeding to the sanctuary or using good quality hand gel discreetly.

5. At this stage, there is no need for a universal withdrawal of the Chalice, or the of sign of peace to be universally suspended; although this might be done as a precautionary measure. However, people with cold and flu like symptoms should refrain from the sign of peace or receiving from the chalice if they are present.
NOTE. It can be helpful to remind people that: “Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1377)

6. When visiting parishioners at home, wash hands and/or use hand sanitizer before giving the sacraments. No pastoral visits should be made to people who are self-isolating until isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.

7. Visits to people in care homes or hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

8. It is important to note again that Catholics have the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 1247). However, extraordinary circumstances, such as serious sickness, excuse the faithful from this obligation.

9. PRAY! The USCCB has issued some sample intercessions that can be used at Mass or other liturgical events. Also, in the Missal, under Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, there are three Mass formularies under n. 48 “For Any Need.” These may be used, following liturgical norms (cf. *GIRM*, n.374)

Sample Intercessions:

For those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness that they may be healed, and for the happy repose of all who have died from this sickness in recent week; let us pray to the Lord

For scientists, health professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good in this difficult and uncertain time, that they will be filled with wisdom and understanding; let us pray to the Lord

That in times of illness, our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence; let us pray to the Lord

That our compassionate Father would touch all affected by the current outbreak with healing and peace; let us pray to the Lord

**Stage 2:** A number of cases nationally, or in local communities (such as a State or Diocese), or a case specifically linked to a parish community. The precautions and actions above should be continued. In addition:

1. A Diocesan-wide suspension of the distribution of the Eucharist under both kinds and that the host is to be given on the hand only.
2. When giving communion in the hand seek to ensure you place the host in the hand of the recipient in such a way that you do not touch their hands.
3. Suspend the physical sign of peace. People can, for example, still turn to each other and say “peace be with you.”
4. Remove or empty holy water stoups
5. Public veneration of relics and the Cross on Good Friday should NOT be by kissing or physically touching them (that is if we are at Stage 2 on Good Friday)

6. Advise those most vulnerable (elderly, people with weakened immune systems and long term conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease) to refrain from large parish gatherings and stay at home.

7. Cease use of shared hymn books and missals which could help transmit the virus

8. Ask everyone attending Mass to sanitize their hands as they come into church using sanitized gel dispensers (make these available in porches or entrances).

9. Ensure everyone maintains good hygiene especially at Mass and parish gatherings. Again, THE best way of protecting us from the spread of the virus is for everyone to use universal good hygiene.

10. Ask anyone with cold or flu symptoms to refrain from attending Liturgy, public events not attend the sacrament of reconciliation if symptomatic (They may have an ordinary cold but equally it is important to adopt a precautionary approach.)

11. Ensure very regular cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces many people touch regularly (for example, ideally clean door handles, railings etc. before and after every Mass)

12. If it is the usual practice, do not pass the collection plate around from person to person

13. Ensure Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion sanitize their hands before and after distributing communion (we should be doing this anyway as a matter of course.) This can be done by washing hands discreetly before proceeding to the sanctuary or using good quality hand gel discreetly

14. When visiting parishioners at home, wash hands before giving the sacraments. No pastoral visits to people who are self-isolating until isolation ends. However, do offer phone support.

15. Visits to people in care homes or hospitals should follow advice from the staff on infection control.

16. Suspend catering at large parish gatherings where multiple people touch mugs, utensils, cookies etc.

Stage 3: Many Cases in local parishes It is currently unlikely, but not impossible, that we will get to this stage. This could be at either Vicariate, or Diocesan, or even national level.

• Again, we will know we are at this stage because public authorities will give general advice on suspending large public gatherings. These are the current circumstances in Singapore, for example.

• Mass and Liturgy in public would be suspended and parish gatherings also suspended by the Bishop. (The Bishop has the authority in Canon Law to grant a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.) Specific and detailed guidance will be produced, should we come to this stage. At the time of writing this is not needed.