

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 16

Dear Friends,

As we walk through this Lent, we have an opportunity to embrace sacrifice and ministry in a whole new way. Each day brings new information on the spread of COVID-19 from medical professionals as well as new directives from public health officials and civil authorities.

Bishop Ned Shlesinger and I look to serve the spiritual needs of our people as we make decisions on how best to protect the health of our communities. We want you to know that, in concert with the College of Consultors of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, we have wrestled with each of these decisions. The well-being and safety of all the faithful are preeminent in our concerns.

Effective Tuesday, March 17, we will suspend all public Masses for the next three weeks including the weekends of March 21-22; March 28-29; and April 4-5. As new information and directives come out from the government, we will continue to evaluate and revise our provisions. Please let your people know, the Sacrifice of the Mass will continue. Our priests will still be offering private Masses for those in their care.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta is going to step up efforts to make spiritual resources available to you during this time. You can check our website for updates on current directives as well as a list of Masses offered online via live-stream, broadcast, or social media. These Masses are private and the faithful should only participate online. The faithful can also find online a collection of prayer and spiritual resources as well as ideas for home catechesis. Bishop Shlesinger and I will partner with other clergy at the chancery to offer a livestream Mass from the chapel at the chancery office as well as periodic video messages to the faithful. Look for those messages to begin Tuesday, March 17.

Churches will remain open for prayer and adoration. We ask that you practice social distancing when utilizing these spaces. Do not come if you are sick or if coming will put you at great risk of becoming sick. Churches may choose to move adoration from a small chapel into the main sanctuary where people can spread out.

Priests will still be able to hear individual confessions by appointment, but penance services are canceled. Weddings and funerals will be limited to immediate family only with no in-parish receptions allowed right now. All other gatherings in parish facilities should be canceled or postponed.

Confirmations are postponed until further notice.

In-person parish faith formation opportunities should be suspended during this time. This does not, however, mean that faith formation should cease. The archdiocesan website has resources for individuals and parents who wish to stay engaged in this way. Parish staff and volunteers can minister to their communities by calling people at home, checking on the elderly or otherwise marginalized, and seeking opportunities to use technology to connect individuals and communities.

We can still unite in prayer. We can still care for our neighbors. We are still the Body of Christ. We are challenged to find non-traditional ways to connect with one another. It is a sacrifice, for sure, for all of us to alter our participation in the Eucharist, a sacrifice as unwelcome as it is new. Still, we understand that it is, for the time being, a cross we bear in a spirit of self-denial, an emptying of ourselves in imitation of Our Lord's privation as He faced His Passion. We know that we can hope in the Resurrection. Let us bring that hope to our neighbors and our communities through our sacrifice, our service, and our prayer.

In Jesus and Mary,

Most Reverend Joel M. Konzen, S.M.
Diocesan Administrator