



Diocese of Belleville Office of the Bishop

March 17, 2020
Feast of St. Patrick, Bishop

Dear Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious, Principals, Teachers and Diocesan and Agency Staffs:

May the Peace of Jesus Christ be with you!

***"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
whoever believes in Me, even if he should die,
shall have Eternal Life."***

--Jesus of Nazareth

Lent is the season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; a time of preparation for Holy Week when we meditate on the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. None of us knew on Ash Wednesday that this would be a Lent like no other, when the entire world would be engulfed by a new, potentially life-threatening illness, the coronavirus pandemic. In the United States, this illness has caused particular concern because our country seems to be lagging behind other countries in preparation for a such widespread health crisis, especially in the area of testing and hospital resources.

There is much about this virus that is unknown and the unknown can sometimes lead to fear and even panic. Some Christians are asking: Is this suffering God's will? Is it part of a Divine Plan? Could it be a punishment for sin in the world with God punishing the just along with the unjust? If Americans had a greater faith and prayed more fervently, would a miracle occur and rid the world of this scourge? Or, could this sudden event be a random act of nature with no specific theological or religious meaning? In truth, I do not know the answers to these questions. However, I am confident of this foundational Christian belief that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be our Savior. God loves and cares for each of us in every circumstance. He accompanies all of us in the journey of life through great suffering and great joy with His compassionate mercy.

With this letter, I am giving directives to the entire Diocese that go beyond my letter of March 13, 2020. **These directives MUST BE FOLLOWED faithfully by everyone in every parish.** This means that no Pastor or Administrator has the authority to act contrary to these directives or make changes in them. The Christian Faithful in every parish should be given the same instructions to avoid the confusion that would follow if different parishes provided different guidelines.

In order to help slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in our community, I am now directing you to suspend all public celebrations of the Eucharist in the Diocese of Belleville effective immediately. This directive will remain in effect until personally rescinded or changed by me. Because of the rapidly changing mandates from local, state, and federal governments as well as health officials, this is necessarily an evolving situation which may require re-evaluation and adjustment in the weeks ahead. Social distancing and proper hygiene will diminish communal transmission and flatten the curve of the virus, thus sparing us the stringent requirements of “lockdown” and “sheltering in place.” (See Center for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov>).

As with my directives of March 13, 2020, concerning the Liturgy and school closure, this has been a pastorally difficult decision. I have made it only after wide consultation with the Cabinet, the Vicars Forane, the Presbyteral Council Officers, local physicians, and representatives of the laity. Still, it is depriving the People of God of the unique spiritual nourishment of the Eucharist during Lent, which is surely a painful paradox. Dire circumstances compel me to care for the safety and physical health and wellbeing of the families and individuals of our Diocese, while seeking other ways of providing spiritual nourishment. Please review the new detailed guidelines below.

1.) MASSES: I am dispensing all Catholics in our Diocese from the obligation of participating in the Sunday Eucharist effective immediately. It would distress me to have to cancel the Chrism Mass and the Sacred Triduum in our parishes. **At this point, I am not doing so.** However, you should know that I may have no choice but to do so, if the virus does not flatline in the coming weeks.

- All public celebrations of the Liturgy, as well as Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, and all other group services, Bible studies, Parish School of Religion, Pre-Cana sessions, and **all other parish activities attended by more than ten people** must cease immediately. (Fish Frys *may continue as take-out meals only* with staffing in accord with allowable number of workers and safe distancing.)

- Priests should continue celebrating the Eucharist “*sine populo*” (without a congregation) and should include the assistance of at least one other adult minister, if possible. No more than four ministers should be gathered for this purpose. Holy Communion may still be distributed by the priest to the small group participating in a “*sine populo*” celebration of the Eucharist.

- The intentions for all Eucharists celebrated “*sine populo*” should be reassigned as “*missas pro populo*” (Masses offered for the people). Every effort should be made to reschedule the original intentions of these Eucharistic Celebrations for a future Mass, at a later date.

- Please work with your parish staff and lay members to offer live-streamed celebrations of the Eucharist where possible. A live stream can be accomplished by broadcasting the celebration of the Eucharist with a smartphone or tablet to social media streaming tools. Live-streaming from parishioners’ home parish is preferred, however, that may not be possible. Links to assist in setting up live-stream of the Eucharist are in the resources attached to this letter.

2.) EUCHARISTIC ADORATION: There will be no Eucharistic Adoration at parishes or institutions, unless the pastor can arrange this in such a way that there are no more than 10 people present at one time maintaining the social distancing guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

3.) WEDDINGS/FUNERALS/BAPTISMS: It may be best to reschedule these events, if possible. If not possible to reschedule, these important liturgies must be restricted to a small group of (10) immediate family and friends only. Often, it may be best to reschedule weddings. Some Funeral Directors are only allowing immediate families for visitations and only 10 family members at the burial. Parish pastors should determine whether to continue with baptisms. However, these must be simple, private, individual ceremonies.

4.) SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: In the weeks leading up to Easter, the Faithful rightly seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation and look forward to going to confession during Lenten Penance Services, which will not be possible. In accord with Canon Law (960-963), and because of the current grave danger of transmitting the coronavirus in private confessionals (either "behind the screen" or "face to face"), I hereby authorize priests to legitimately use from the *Rite of Penance* the rite for General Absolution **during this time of crisis only**. This Rite includes sacred scripture, an explanation by the priest, a common act of contrition, the Lord's prayer and then the granting of absolution, followed by a penance. **N.B. This can ONLY be done if you can arrange a series of small services attracting no more than 10 people, who can maintain distance from one another in the church.** You could, for example, set aside a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday as "A Day of Mercy" and celebrate a modified rite several times on the same day between now and Easter. If you have a room in the church area that is large enough and provides confidentiality, you may continue one-on-one Confessions as long as you arrange chairs for priest and penitent at least 6 feet apart. (I know how awkward this sounds. But, I cannot think of another way of handling this unique situation!)

5.) MINISTRY TO SICK AND AGED: Holy Communion must be given in the hand to the elderly, the sick (not in nursing homes) or homebound by ministers in good health to individuals with no symptoms of the virus.

6.) ANOINTING OF THE SICK: The Anointing of the Sick must still be administered by priests to those seriously ill or in danger of death. However, priests administering this Sacrament must be in good health. All those administering sacraments to the elderly, sick or homebound MUST follow proper protocols from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for handwashing and use of masks by those infected and those who are ministering to them.

7.) COLLECTIONS: Pastors should not be embarrassed or ashamed to remind parishioners that their financial support remains an integral part of parish life and the continued operation of our parishes and their mission of Christian service. Please encourage the Faithful to continue giving of their time, talent, and treasure at this difficult time. Encourage them to use online giving, mail, or drop-off their Sunday Offertory at the rectory or Parish Office.

8.) CHARITABLE GIVING: The Diocese understands the economic impact that the current health crisis is having on so many individuals and families in our parishes as well as on our community as a whole. In times like this, it is particularly urgent for us to assist our brothers and sisters who are most in need. I encourage you to minister to your neighbors and those in need in your local communities. Please continue to work to support individuals who depend on parish charitable efforts for food and other necessities. Many Catholic people might feel a greater motivation, at this time, to support organizations that are responding to this crisis such as St. Vincent de Paul, the Catholic Urban Program, DAYSTAR, food pantries and clothing drives. Please do not neglect to encourage your parishioners to continue their needed support to the Catholic Service and Ministry Appeal.

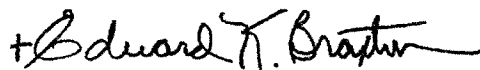
I am deeply concerned about how each of you are doing at this time. I cannot overstress the need for you to take care of yourself. Follow hygiene rules carefully, take your temperature if you feel unwell. The body temperature of a healthy person averages 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. If yours is 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or more, talk to your doctor. Please get a sufficient amount of rest and eat a healthful diet. Take your day off. Spend time with your family, stay close to the members of your support group, even online. Confide your concerns to a true friend and set aside a particular time each day to pray and reflect. Do not overindulge in repetitious, depressing and negative news coverage of the virus. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

I am fully united with you in mind and heart as we navigate the challenges of this Brave New World. I know that these new directives will have an impact on almost every aspect of your parish. They will be disturbing and frustrating to parishioners, some of whom may react negatively. This will require greater patience and empathy with them on your part. Be patient with yourself as well. Please pray for me that I may have the wisdom and the courage needed to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions.

Our Lady Help of Christians, Pray for us!

Oremus pro invicem

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward K. Braxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville



Diocese of Belleville

RESOURCES

**(Please take the time to read these resources carefully
and make use of them in your ministry.)**

All of the Bishop's statements and directives concerning the pastoral response to the coronavirus are being posted on the banner of the Diocesan web site: www.diobelle.org

The Chancery and the Diocesan Pastoral Center remain open at this time with all personnel observing the protocol of small group meetings and social distancing.

Sacred Heart and Kendrick-Glennon seminaries have been closed. Our seminarians have either remained in the seminary or returned home.

The following are ways to help you and your parishioners to Keep Holy the Lord's Day:

Our Catholic priests and the faithful have a great love for the Eucharist. In times of persecution, they have risked their lives in order to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. Some have abandoned their faith in such times. My temporary dispensation from the Sunday obligation is not comparable to abandoning faith under the pressure of persecution. We are doing this out of love and concern for our sisters and brothers who are vulnerable because of their age or underlying health conditions. We are inspired by the many Catholic doctors, nurses, and ministers who are generously putting themselves at risk at this time to serve others. One way of keeping holy the Lord's day is by supporting these selfless individuals with our prayers and encouragement.

- Pastors are encouraged to prepare their Sunday homilies and communicate them to the Faithful by email, Facebook or other means. Or, you could easily make your sermons available online on the great readings from the Gospel of John on the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus.
- The Faithful should be encouraged to download the Sunday readings and use them for family prayers and reflection so as to continue to keep Sunday as a Holy Day. Pastors are urged to use part of Sunday to call parishioners, offering words of encouragement to them and offering support in the face of their worries about the virus and financial instability, even praying with them when appropriate.
- The stress and uncertainty of this situation causes anxiety for all of us. Look for helpful, uplifting, and informative articles and send them to your people so they can become more knowledgeable and more hopeful. Encourage them to read Scripture, pray the rosary, pray meal prayers and morning and night prayers together with family members.
- Encourage Spiritual Communion with Jesus Christ using the prayer posed on the Diocesan website.

- **Watch a televised Celebration of the Eucharist together.**

EWTN: <https://www.ewtn.com>

(common link to cable channels is: <https://www.ewtn.com/channel-finder>

Catholic TV: <https://www.catholictv.org>

Bishop Robert Barron, Word on Fire, posts a daily celebration of the Eucharist at 7:15AM.

It can be viewed at any time.

<https://www.wordonfire.org/daily-mass/>

- Encourage families to be creative in supporting the faith of their children while at home, e.g., teaching them new prayers, reading and talking about Bible stories. Pray over the readings of the day or the liturgy of the hours.

- **Daily Eucharist Scripture Readings and Prayers:**

<http://www.usccb.org>

Magnificat:

<https://us.magnificat.net/free>

<https://latina/magnificat.net/gratis>

Liturgy of the Hours:

<https://universalis.com/index.htm>

<https://www.ibreviary.org/en>

<https://www.ebreviary.com>

<https://ebreviary.com/ebreviary/ebreviary.nsf/prayersforeveryone.html>

- **Instructions on How to Live-Stream Sunday Eucharist at your parish:**

Using Google:

https://support.google.com/youtube/topic/9257891?gclid=Cj0KCQjw6sHzBRCbARIsAF8FMpXCZolmDU6ilVb7UPEcMeIB8tWF6OIBOZH_R6uk1JYeJrwx7SW5ABYApMJEA_Lw_wcB&gclid=aw.ds

Using Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/587160588142067>

If it is your custom to leave the church unlocked during the day, you should continue to do so and encourage private prayer and devotion, making sure that large numbers are not present at the same time.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

Scrutinies: Since the first Scrutiny took place on the Third Sunday of Lent and because of the extraordinary circumstances that we are currently experiencing, I am dispensing the elect and their parishes from celebrating the other two scrutinies. Only a Bishop may dispense from the scrutinies.

Presentation of the Lord's Prayer and of the Creed: The presentations normally take place after the scrutinies during the period of purification and enlightenment. They are celebrated on a weekday with the elect, priest and small group (no more than 10). The Presentation of the Lord's Prayer is celebrated the

Fifth Week of Lent. The Presentation/Recitation of the Creed is shared with the elect on Holy Saturday morning. Please adapt as necessary to fit your situation in these extraordinary times.

EUCCHARIST AT THE POOR CLARES MONASTERY: If there is a priest in good health who is available, the Eucharist may be celebrated for the Sisters ONLY. Regretfully, the Mass is closed to the public at this time.

Additional Information:

SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR IN PERSONS EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS:

Within 5 days of exposure, may exhibit a fever of 100.4 or higher (although some may exhibit NO fever and still have the virus), chills, a sore throat, a deep, dry cough.

Within 8-10 days of exposure, if shortness of breath occurs, hospitalization will be required.

A covered sneeze spans a distance of 6 feet in the direction of the sneeze.

An uncovered sneeze spans a distance of 8 feet in all directions.

The latest update indicates that young people MAY NOT be as immune to the virus as previously thought. More and more cases of infected youths have been reported.

For more information go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Additional Resources attached:

“I am a scientist working to stop coronavirus... We should cancel all Masses.” AMERICA

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/13/i-am-scientist-working-stop-coronavirus-we-should-cancel-all-masses>

“Flattening the Coronavirus Curve: Chart explaining why slowing the spread of the infection is nearly as important as stopping it. Siobhan Roberts, The New York Times, March 13, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html>

“What If Public Masses are Cancelled?” by Dr. Timothy O’Malley, McGrath Institute for Church Life, University of Notre Dame. <https://mcgrathblog.nd.edu/what-if-public-masses-are-cancelled>

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AMERICA

I am a scientist working to stop coronavirus. We should cancel all Masses.



Patrick O'Neill March 13, 2020



Police officers patrol an empty St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Wednesday, March 11. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

As is already clear from the sudden rash of closings, cancellations and diagnoses of prominent people, the coronavirus outbreak is spreading rapidly throughout the United States. In response, many bishops have taken the difficult but prudent step of dispensing the faithful from their Sunday Mass obligation. Those decisions are to be commended for the sake of public safety. Other bishops, however, have gone further. Some dioceses (including Seattle, Chicago, Newark and others) have suspended the public celebration of Masses altogether. If bishops wish to do their utmost to contain the spread of the outbreak, it is my sorrowful conclusion that they must

all take this extraordinary step and suspend Masses throughout the United States until the outbreak has been stabilized.

If bishops wish to do their utmost to contain the spread of the outbreak, it is my sorrowful conclusion that they must all take this extraordinary step and suspend Masses.

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Please let me be clear: I am not a theologian and do not pretend to possess the competence to make theological claims. I am only a computational biologist alarmed by the spread of the coronavirus. One week ago I took a leave of absence from my work to volunteer with the [New England Complex Systems Institute](#), which has rapidly assembled a global network of volunteers in science, technology and policy [in order to help contain the outbreak](#). I am also a catechumen. But even as one only a few steps down the lifelong path of conversion, I am deeply concerned for the well-being of the Catholic faithful and am cognizant of the church's great potential influence to combat the spread of the infection. It is my lay understanding that the suspension of public Masses is a measure that bishops may take in the gravest of circumstances. I simply wish to explain the gravity of the present situation from a scientific point of view and explain how the continued celebration of public Masses makes them even graver.

In recent days, people with ordinary levels of scientific literacy may have heard uncertain and conflicting reports about the scope and gravity of the outbreak. As a scientist who has been involved in conversations among experts on this issue, I therefore wish to first summarize the best understanding of the epidemiological community.

What we know about the virus and outbreak

Covid-19 is the disease caused by SARS-nCoV-2, a novel coronavirus that emerged from Hubei, China, late last year and spread throughout the globe. As of this writing, there have been [over 135,000 confirmed cases worldwide and over 5,000 deaths](#). In the United States, the numbers stand at [almost 1,700 confirmed cases](#) and at least 41 deaths. The true number of Covid-19 infections is unknown, due to the difficulties and limited availability of clinical testing. Several different estimates by different methods all suggest that the true case load is underestimated by a factor of 10 or 100. The true number of infections in the United States is therefore now between 17,000 and 170,000.

[*\[Explore all of America's in-depth coverage of the coronavirus pandemic\]*](#)

Covid-19 is not properly comparable to the flu, as is sometimes suggested. Hospitalization is required in 10 to 20 percent of cases. According to my best estimate ([based on current data](#), calculating deaths as a percentage of confirmed cases), the mortality rate is 3.7 percent (almost 40 times that of the flu), and may rise to as much as 10 percent if hospital treatment is unavailable. Covid-19 is spreading rapidly in the United States, with the number of confirmed infections [doubling approximately every three days](#). The U.S. has approximately [one million hospital beds](#), of which [perhaps 450,000](#) are free at any given time, and not all of those are equipped to treat the acute respiratory distress that Covid-19 can cause. At current rates, we will reach hospital capacity in less than three weeks. Due to the rapid doubling time, every day of

inaction at this stage of the outbreak could increase the total toll of the outbreak by roughly 25 percent.

The Covid-19 outbreak can be slowed and stabilized, as China's example shows. But we must also enact immediate and stringent measures as China did. Halting the outbreak in Wuhan required radical interventions: quarantining cities, disrupting daily life and restricting the movement of almost 800 million people. These measures were indeed draconian. However, because Covid-19 can only be combated by reducing opportunities for transmission, they were also necessary to avoid complete infection of the entire country.

How suspending public Masses can help contain the outbreak

Recently, the bishops of many U.S. dioceses have dispensed the obligation to assist at Mass. This is an excellent first step and they are to be commended for recognizing the severity of the situation. Other bishops have gone further, suspending the public celebration of Mass entirely. While a dispensation from the Sunday obligation, leaving the faithful free to decide whether to go to Mass, benefits Catholics who are anxious about exposure to Covid-19, it does not go far enough from an epidemiological perspective.

Given what we know about this outbreak, any large gathering of even apparently healthy people still constitutes a grave public health risk.

Tweet this

Given what we know about this outbreak, any large gathering of even apparently healthy people still constitutes a grave public health risk. Already we are approaching the point where there is a non-negligible probability (about 7 percent, according to my estimates, and rapidly rising) that any gathering of 100 people will involve at least one person infected with Covid-19. Therefore, I argue, it is not enough that attendance at large public gatherings be made morally optional; there is a moral duty to avoid even holding large public gatherings whenever possible.

There are several reasons for this admittedly severe position. First, newly infected patients may take one to two weeks to develop symptoms, and many cases remain completely asymptomatic throughout. Such patients are still infectious for much of this time and may therefore transmit their infections unknowingly. Second, it must be said that a policy of voluntary self-quarantine for those with infections is only partially reliable, as we have already seen examples of patients knowingly violating self-quarantine for far more trivial reasons than to go to Mass. Patients in such a situation may be unaware of the full implications of their decision, but this does not mitigate the risk of their choices. Lastly, even if Catholics wish to endure extreme *personal* risks to attend Mass (a position with which I am sympathetic), they cannot physically do so without also imposing grave *social* risks on the public. In a statistical sense, the position of an asymptotically infected Catholic attending Mass today is analogous to someone driving to Mass by a route that will unknowingly take them through a crowded sidewalk, unintentionally but unavoidably imperiling the lives of passersby.

The Covid-19 outbreak will be a profound challenge for the church, and it must be fought along every front of an extremely complex battle. This challenge will require the deepest outpourings

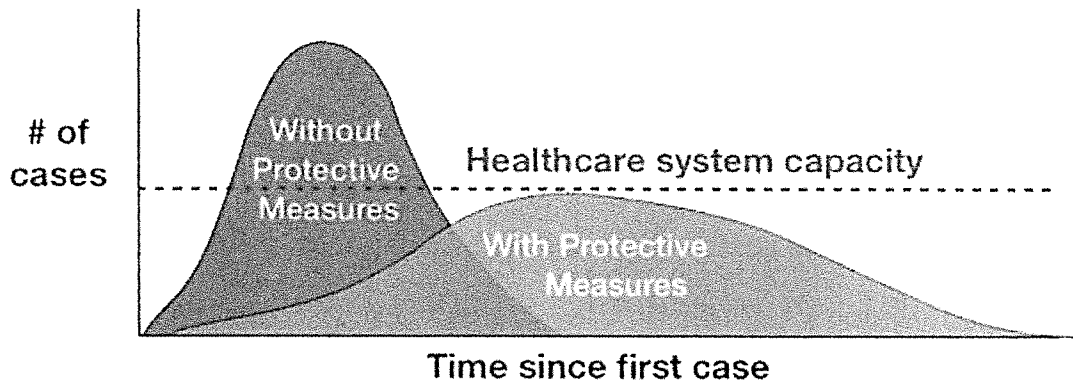
of faith, hope and love, and the most rigorous exercises of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. In my scientific opinion, I regret to say, there is no prudent way for a Catholic in the United States to attend any large public gathering without aggravating the spread of the outbreak risking the lives of others. Suspension of public Masses is an extraordinary measure, but one that some U.S. bishops, as well as bishops in other affected countries including Italy, have already taken, and the entire U.S. church must follow suit. The church must respond with every ounce of intelligence, creativity, flexibility and compassion at its disposal in order to continue to feed the spiritual hunger of mankind without putting lives at risk.

Correction, March 14, 2020: Due to an editing error, the diocese of Providence and all dioceses in Pennsylvania were incorrectly described as having suspended the public celebration of Mass. Providence and the Pennsylvania dioceses have dispensed the faithful from their Sunday obligation, but at this time are not among the dioceses that have suspended the public celebration of Mass.

Patrick O'Neill, Ph.D., is a computational biologist, machine learning engineer and catechumen living in Somerville, Mass. He is currently volunteering with the New England Complex Systems Institute, at endcoronavirus.org, to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Flattening the Coronavirus Curve: Chart explaining why slowing the spread of the infection is nearly as important as stopping it. Siobhan Roberts, The New York Times, March 13, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html>



Adapted from CDC / The Economist

The longer it takes for coronavirus to spread the population, the more time hospitals have to prepare.

By Siobhan Roberts, March 13, 2020, [The New York Times](#)

At the end of February, Drew Harris, a population health analyst at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, had just flown across the country to visit his daughter in Eugene, Ore., when he saw an article on his Google news feed. It was from [The Economist](#), and was about limiting the damage of the coronavirus.

The accompanying art, by the visual-data journalist Rosamund Pearce, based on a graphic that had appeared in a C.D.C. paper titled "[Community Mitigation Guidelines to Prevent Pandemic Influenza](#)," showed what Dr. Harris called two epi curves. One had a steep peak indicating a surge of coronavirus outbreak in the near term; the other had a flatter slope, indicating a more gradual rate of infection over a longer period of time.

The gentler curve ultimately results in fewer people infected and fewer deaths. "What we need to do is flatten that down," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, during the coronavirus task force briefing at the White House on Tuesday evening. "You do that with trying to interfere with the natural flow of the outbreak."

The infographic reminded Dr. Harris of something similar that he had designed years earlier for a pandemic preparedness training program. "Folks in the preparedness and public health community have been thinking about all of these issues for many years," Dr. Harris said in an email. "Understanding and managing surge is an important part of preparedness." But during the

training course, Dr. Harris's students had struggled with the concept of reducing the epidemic curve, so he added a dotted line indicating hospital capacity — "to make clear what was at stake," he said.

After his visit with his daughter, Dr. Harris was waiting for his return flight in Portland when the first Oregon coronavirus case was announced; he had dinner at a busy airport bar and thought about how quiet the place would be in a week or two when the reality of the outbreak set in. Once home, he recreated his graphic and posted it on Twitter and LinkedIn, and was pleased to see the enthusiastic interest in flattening the curve.

"Now I know what going viral means," Dr. Harris said. (For a more detailed analysis, see a recent paper in The Lancet, "How will country-based mitigation measures influence the course of the COVID-19 epidemic?")

The following is an edited version of our email conversation.

What does it mean to "flatten the curve"?

The ideal goal in fighting an epidemic or pandemic is to completely halt the spread. But merely slowing it — mitigation — is critical. This reduces the number of cases that are active at any given time, which in turn gives doctors, hospitals, police, schools and vaccine-manufacturers time to prepare and respond, without becoming overwhelmed. Most hospitals can function with 10 percent reduction in staff, but not with half their people out at once.

Some commentators have argued for getting the outbreak over with quickly. That is a recipe for panic, unnecessary suffering and death. Slowing and spreading out the tidal wave of cases will save lives. Flattening the curve keeps society going.

What exactly do those two curves show?

Both curves add up the number of new cases over time. The more people reporting with the virus on a given day, the higher the curve; a high curve means the virus is spreading fast. A low curve shows that the virus is spreading slower — fewer people are diagnosed with the disease on any given day. Keeping the curve down — diminishing the rate at which new cases occur — prevents overtaxing the finite resources (represented by the dotted line) available to treat it.

Think of the health care system capacity as a subway car that can only hold so many people at once. During rush hour, that capacity is not enough to handle the demand, so people must wait on the platform for their turn to ride. Staggering work hours diminishes the rush hour and increases the likelihood that you will get on the train and maybe even get a seat. Avoiding a surge of coronavirus cases can ensure that anyone who needs care will find it at the hospital.

What sorts of mitigation measures help transform the red curve into the blue curve?

Diseases spread when one person gives it to one or more others, who go on to give it to more people, and so on. How fast this occurs depends on many factors, including how contagious the disease is, how many people are vulnerable and how quickly they get sick.

The difference between seasonal flu and coronavirus is that many people have full or partial immunity to the flu virus because they have had it before or were vaccinated against it. Far more people are vulnerable to coronavirus, so it has many more targets of opportunity to spread. Keeping people apart in time and space with social distancing measures, self-isolation and actual quarantine decreases opportunities for transmission.

To take the subway example again, a packed car — or a packed subway platform — is a great place to spread the virus. But reducing the number of people on the train or platform, by asking people to work from home or to stagger their working hours, enables individuals to stay farther apart, limiting the spread of the virus. That is social distancing in action.

Mitigation efforts keep people farther apart, making every transmission opportunity marginally less likely. This slows the spread. We should, and will, take the most vulnerable people out of the population altogether by keeping them totally separate. This is what Washington State is trying to do by limiting visitors to nursing homes. Think of this as a reverse quarantine.

What are you doing day-to-day in response to these unusual times?

Like most everyone else, I'm more aware of my surroundings and behaviors. I try to use a sleeve or elbow to open doors, and I wash my hands or use hand sanitizers after I touch a surface that might be contaminated. And I made sure to have a good supply of my prescription and nonprescription medications, just in case any shortages occur after the shutdown of Chinese pharmaceutical suppliers. I'm following the lead of my public health officials here in Philadelphia, where there is only one case as of Tuesday, and travel isn't restricted. I'm avoiding crowds and sick people. I am going out, and will continue to do so unless a quarantine is ordered or public places are closed.

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I know there is a good chance that I will catch the virus before a vaccine becomes available, but I also believe I'm very likely to do fine. I'm not in any high-risk group. But I worry about the more vulnerable folks and want to do what I can to prevent the spread. I also worry about people who lack the resources I have. What happens to the self-employed, hourly workers and people in the gig economy when business stops? What about the homeless who depend upon charity and services for support? It's these second-order effects that could be just as devastating if this epidemic really takes off.

“I am a scientist working to stop coronavirus...We should cancel all Masses.” AMERICA

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/03/13/i-am-scientist-working-stop-coronavirus-we-should-cancel-all-masses>

What If Public Masses Are Canceled?

By Dr. Timothy O'Malley
McGrath Institute for Church Life
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The degree to which Catholics love the Mass has never been more evident than in Catholic Twitter's reaction to liturgical adjustments made because of the Coronavirus outbreak. The cancellation of the Eucharist in Rome has led many to wonder how the faithful can survive without regular celebration of the Mass in their presence, the reception of Holy Communion as a way of receiving grace in these trying times. Our longing to receive the Eucharist during this time, to hear the Holy Scriptures, and spend time with one another in Christian community is a sign that our identity as Catholics is closely tied to the Eucharist.

Still, some of the more cantankerous members of Catholic Twitter have grumbled about the possible elimination of the Sign of Peace (shaking hands during this Sign of Peace is not actually a liturgical requirement), eliminating the holding of hands during the Our Father (not part of the Rite in the first place), and not receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord on the tongue.

The on-again, off-again bitterness that has accompanied the liturgical prescriptions given by dioceses considering the present epidemic is ultimately anti-Eucharistic. As St. Thomas Aquinas notes, the *res tantum* of the Eucharist—that is, the ultimate reality that the Eucharist points to—is the union of the body of believers brought together through the *caritas* of Christ. The Church is called to be the unity of humankind, gathered in adoration around the Lamb once slain, becoming a space of peace in a world more often defined by violence and force.

Thus, giving up one's preferred liturgical practices for the benefit of Christ's Body, perhaps even giving up regular reception of the Eucharist, is the ultimate meaning of the Eucharist. The Eucharist, after all, is fundamentally about self-sacrificial love unto the end. If public liturgical celebrations are cancelled in the United States (and they may be), this doesn't mean that the Christian faithful are left without grace. For the desire to praise God, to care for the vulnerable in our midst, to forego a practice intrinsic to the flourishing of our spiritual lives for the benefit of our neighbor, is the very spiritual sacrifice that the Eucharist demands.

If the Church ends up in a situation where public liturgical celebrations are cancelled, even those for Easter itself, this will undoubtedly cause sadness. And yet that sadness is a sign of something more, a recognition that desire for God is built into our very beings. And that sadness—the desire to offer the sacrifice of praise back to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit—is itself the Eucharistic sacrifice that many of the baptized will be called to offer.

In the end, even when we Catholics are not gathered together, we are part of one another. That's what it means to belong to the Church in the first place. Through Christ, each of us is united to one another in our sufferings and our joys.

The cancellation of public liturgical celebrations can't stop that.