



Archdiocese of Hartford to Enact Additional Measures to Combat the Spread of Coronavirus

March 13, 2020

In light of Governor Lamont declaring both a “public health emergency” and a “civil preparedness emergency” on Tuesday, March 10, and with the World Health Organization officially categorizing the coronavirus as a “pandemic” on Wednesday, March 11, in the interest of public health it is necessary to implement additional measures pertaining to liturgical celebrations and other events that include gatherings of many people. We all need to do our part to halt the spread of this dangerous virus and to keep our towns and communities safe and healthy. To this end, Archbishop Leonard P. Blair has directed that:

- **Effective immediately and through Sunday, March 29, the Archbishop has dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass each and every Catholic in the Archdiocese of Hartford.** This dispensation is offered with the understanding that some will still wish to attend Mass, while others may be less willing out of fear for their own health or the health of others. That is a decision left to the individual, but with the caution that all the precautions of hygiene and social distancing should be followed, and that if someone is ill or having symptoms, out of charity they should not go to church. However, to repeat, **through March 29 all Catholics of the Archdiocese of Hartford are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.**
 - That public Masses can continue to be celebrated is in keeping with what Pope Francis has urged, “that the Holy Spirit give pastors the capacity for pastoral discernment, so they find measures that don’t leave the holy faithful people of God alone, so the people of God feel accompanied by their pastors and draw comfort from the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer.”
 - It is also in keeping with Governor Ned Lamont’s Executive Order of yesterday, which prohibits gatherings of 250 people or more throughout the State through the end of April but makes an exemption for worship services. However, local authorities may ask parishes to consider temporarily suspending the public celebration of Mass. Pastors will be required to follow any ordinances or mandates published by legitimate local authorities, who have been entrusted to protect the community at large.

- If any future ban on public assemblies necessitates the suspension of public Mass, Pastors should see that all Mass intentions are fulfilled, and all priests would be expected to celebrate private Mass daily.
- All Confirmation liturgies scheduled to take place before Easter are now postponed to a future date to be determined as the situation unfolds.
- Daily Masses, Eucharistic adoration or other liturgies that are celebrated in a more confined space in small chapels should be moved to the larger church building so that participants can maintain a safer, healthier distance from one another.
- In a larger church people should be encouraged to spread out to maintain a greater distance from one another and to choose one of the more sparsely attended Masses.
- Confessionals should be equipped with screens that protect, and a safe distance should be maintained, especially between priest and penitent for those who go face-to-face.
- Priests have the duty to minister to the sick and to administer the sacraments to the dying, but they are also obliged to protect their health by following all the directives of health professionals in approaching anyone who is ill. Elderly priests in particular should be especially careful, given the severe toll of the coronavirus on the aged.

These measures are in addition to the precautionary measures enacted by Archbishop Blair in a statement from March 3, which are as follows:

- The sign of peace should be exchanged without physical contact like hand-shaking; or else the call to exchange a sign of peace should simply be omitted.
- The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful via the chalice should be suspended; concelebrants and assisting deacons should receive only by intinction.
- Communion on the tongue should be strongly discouraged.
- There should be minimal handling of collection baskets, by ushers only.
- Holy Water fonts should be emptied.
- Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are urged to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins or even using an alcohol-based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion.

As liturgical matters continue to arise, we may offer additional guidance. For example, as Holy Week draws near it is clear that kissing the cross on Good Friday is not appropriate this year and a bow or genuflection will suffice. But in every circumstance pastors in particular, with their parish leadership, need to exercise prudence and good judgment in keeping with all the public health directives that are being issued, and with sound liturgical principles. This request for prudence and good judgment also applies to all parish programs, fundraisers, events, dinners, etc. Decisions should be made in keeping with the directives that have been made by the national, state and local authorities, especially the local municipality and school district. The goal is to stop propagating the virus as a result of exposure at gatherings of people, especially larger gatherings, and people are to be kept away from close proximity to one another as much as possible. Whenever possible meetings should be attended remotely by teleconference.

At the current time, the following events that are either sponsored by our Archdiocesan offices or are significant to our communities have been cancelled or postponed either directly by the archdiocese or other sponsoring organizations. Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and that you are encouraged to contact sponsoring agencies of events that you had planned on attending.

- March 17: FACS St. Patrick's Day Breakfast
- March 19: St. Joseph Day Priest Gathering
- March 22: St. Joseph Medal Ceremony
 - Regarding the St. Joseph Medal Ceremony specifically, it is very disappointing that this major celebration in the life of the archdiocese has to be cancelled. A determination is being made of the most efficient manner of sending to each parish the medals for this year's awardees. Pastors are asked to identify a way to make a local parish presentation of the medals in a celebratory manner, keeping in mind that this too may have to be postponed for a while depending on circumstances as they arise. The Archbishop deeply regrets not being able to confer the medals personally, but the health and welfare of the recipients is primary.
- March 28: Missio Faith Formation Congress
- March 29: Mass & Listening Session for Deacons' Wives and Widows
- St. Patrick's Day Parades (in Hartford and New Haven)
- Performances of "Tolton: From Slave to Priest" by Saint Luke Productions

Looking ahead, it is quite possible that as the situation surrounding the coronavirus develops additional events will be cancelled or postponed and further guidelines may be implemented. If and when this occurs, an effort will be made to keep everyone informed in as timely a manner as possible.

As for Archdiocesan high schools, parochial schools and other instructional programs, the Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis has issued a notice with 11 specific directives. This document can be viewed at archdioceseofhartford.org/coronavirus.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in keeping our communities healthy. Further personnel and travel-related matters have been sent to all archdiocesan parishes, offices, and schools in a separate document. Going forward, an update will be published every two days by the Archdiocese on all matters related to the coronavirus. Archbishop Blair has also released a spiritual message by letter and video to be shared with all parishioners regarding the spiritual dimension of the current crisis and the need for prayer at this time of crisis, which can also be found at archdioceseofhartford.org/coronavirus.