

Archdiocese of Baltimore
Guidelines for Responding to the COVID-19 Virus
March 16, 2020

The following are updated guidelines to assist pastors and parishes in responding to challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus.

The following guidance should be expected to apply for at least the next 8 weeks, the timeframe set by the CDC on March 15, 2020. Your own planning should be based on the expectation that it will be at least two months before a return to normalcy and even when restrictions are removed or relaxed, a return to pre-crisis conditions will likely be further delayed by both existing health concerns, even if improved, and people's changed behaviors and attitudes. We will continue to update Archdiocesan guidelines based on your questions, concerns and as issues arise. As conditions and government guidelines change, this timeframe may be altered.

Liturgical

As communicated Saturday, ALL MASSES are to be offered without the physical presence of the faithful until further notice. There are no exceptions. Masses may not be celebrated for small groups of the faithful in chapels or homes. In the cases of Masses celebrated for livestreaming, so as to not create confusion among the faithful who have been told they cannot attend Mass, other "participants" must be strictly limited to the ministers of the Mass such as organist, cantor, lector, server. There is currently no guidance on how to make the Eucharist available to people without bringing large groups together at a single time period, thus contradicting the CDC guidance on limiting exposure at gatherings. Similarly, no scheduled times should be set for such things as Eucharistic Adoration, Stations of the Cross, Rosary, etc. Instead, simply have churches open for private prayer, adoration, etc. This will help eliminate the risk of large groups of people congregating at one time.

While churches should remain open for private prayer, including adoration, there should be no scheduled "services" that would bring people together at a specific time. Numbers of those in church should be monitored and signs noting the State order on the limitation of gatherings, social distancing, and providing guidance on hygiene should be posted. Hand sanitizer should be made available, if possible. People who are ill or vulnerable to illness should be reminded that they should stay home for their safety and for the safety of others. Ushers/parish staff should be instructed to encourage social distancing if it isn't being properly observed. Changes by the State or local authority could alter this guidance. As always, additional information will be shared when available

Holy Week and Easter are most likely to take place during the current restrictions, so please begin planning how you and your parish will mark these sacred days in the life of the Church without the physical presence of the faithful. Technology makes it possible for many people to still participate, so please use every available tool!

Sacraments/Liturgical Events

CONFIRMATION-All Confirmation Masses are suspended until further notice, and will be rescheduled once restrictions are lifted. Guidance is being developed for those who are preparing for Confirmation, but must now do so remotely.

RECONCILIATION-The Archdiocesan-wide “Day of Reconciliation” has been canceled. **The Sacrament of Reconciliation may still be offered**, provided that:

- a) Reconciliation rooms may be used if they offer the required social distancing and privacy; **Traditional Confessionals should not be used** even if the penitent is behind a screen.
- b) Signage be posted where people gather before and after receiving the sacrament re: required social distancing, refraining from entering if ill or vulnerable, practicing proper hygiene and noting the State and CDC limits on gatherings to 50 or fewer;
- c) Sanitizer be offered, where possible, as people enter; and
- d) The number of people present is monitored.

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS-Weddings and funerals may proceed but attendance should be limited to immediate family. Compliance with all state and local government-imposed restrictions on the number of people at public gatherings is mandatory.

BAPTISM-As with weddings and funerals, Baptisms may take place but are restricted to only the sponsors and immediate family of the child being baptized.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK-Those sick who are dying should receive the Sacrament, provided that:

- a) the priest first contact the hospital to confirm any restrictions on visitations;
- b) the priest follow recommended hospital guidelines for protecting himself while administering the Sacrament; and
- c) it be observed that Church law does not require skin to skin contact for administering of the Sacrament.

For any other sacramental questions, please contact Dr. Diane Barr at dbarr@archbalt.org.

The Catholic Center

Beginning Tuesday, March 17, we will operate functions of the Catholic Center from remote locations. A very limited number of essential personnel will report to the building on a daily basis. **Though the vast majority of Catholic Center employees will be working remotely, they will be working and accessible. Email will be the best way to communicate with those employees not working at their desks.** An updated directory of phone numbers will be shared in a future communication.

Meetings

It is urged that all parish meetings take place virtually by using tools such as Zoom or Go-To Meeting. For support using such tools, contact helpdesk@archbalt.org. FreeConferenceCall.com also offers a free solution for gathering by telephone.

Guidance to Religious Communities of Women and Men

Effective immediately, all events, retreats, conferences, programs, or gatherings of any sort, regardless of nature or purpose, that are organized or hosted by Catholic Institutions and Ministries operated by Religious Communities of Women and Men in the Archdiocese must be cancelled, even if the anticipated attendance is projected to be below the 50-person limit. There can be nothing scheduled that would create an opportunity for people to assemble or gather.

At the discretion of the local director of ministry, it is possible for a normally public chapel to remain open for private prayer during limited, published hours within the institution's normal business/opening hours. Private chapels within religious houses are not to be opened at any time to the public, nor should any assembly of the lay faithful occur within a religious house of women or men.

Insofar as possible, all Catholic Institutions and Ministries operated by Religious Communities of Women and Men in the Archdiocese should implement a remote / work-from-home plan for all lay employees and/or volunteers. If the institution or ministry has more than 50 regular employees, provisions must be made so that only essential personnel may work on site for a limited and periodic basis. At no time can there be 50 or more employees on site at any Catholic Institution or Ministry owned or operated by a religious community of women or men in the Archdiocese.

Communication

MYPARISH APP

Continued communication with the faithful is critical at a time when they are being separated from their parish community and from the Eucharist. We are strongly encouraging the use of the MyParish App because it is robust enough to offer both liturgical/spiritual and administrative uses. It also allows electronic giving. To participate in one of the webinars about MyParish App, please see the attached.

In an appropriate way and at a time of your choosing, part of a communication with parishioners should remind them that the needs of the parish continue and the ways in which they can continue to support the parish.

COVID-19 DISCUSSION BOARD

Yammer is a tool available to us through our subscription to Microsoft. It allows for anyone with an archbalt email address (every priest and deacon of the diocese has one) to sign in and view questions and answers that are coming in about the COVID-19 virus impact on operations. Please see the attached document with step-by-step directions for how to sign up and use this tool. Thanks, Msgr. Bozzelli for suggesting we make these conversations available!

The Archbishop will be recording and sharing video reflections for each day of the week. This Friday, the Archbishop will preside at a livestream only Stations of the Cross, Benediction, and Daily Mass at the Cathedral beginning at 4:45 p.m. The Archbishop will be celebrating Mass at the Cathedral each week at 11:00 a.m., which will be livestreamed. We are working to have it broadcast on local television and radio stations. The Archbishop and the auxiliary bishops will be offering regularly livestreamed Masses as often as possible.

There is one central contact for the Archdiocese for all questions, concerns, and reports involving the COVID-19 virus: riskmanagement@archbalt.org. Do not hesitate to contact us to share feedback, questions, or concerns. We readily acknowledge that this is new ground for all of us and that we likely won't make every right decision or think through every need and every contingency. **Be assured of our desire to collaborate with you to address problems and issues as they arise.**

As more information becomes available and as we learn of other questions or concerns more updates will be forthcoming. Updates will also be posted to <https://www.archbalt.org/coronavirus/>, where you can refer parishioners and others for the latest information and news.