



March 24, 2020

Dear Father, Deacon, Parish Director and Director of Administrative Services,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

We continue to see our archdiocese and our country and our world impacted by the CoVID-19/Coronavirus. Please know of my prayers for you and the people entrusted to your care at this very difficult time. Also, know of my pastoral concern for each of you as you experience a sense of reduction in your capability to minister to your people. This is a genuine and real feeling, and an unprecedented one.

I have heard from so many of you regarding decisions I have made or decisions I need to make going forward. My goal in making decisions has been the safety of our people (including each of you) and our responsibility to be good citizens as part of the larger community.

It's easy to say we should keep public Masses and other sacramental and devotional practices, but at what cost? We have free will, but our choices impact many others. Some have said we should be willing to die to celebrate the Eucharist. I agree. But as I heard one Relevant Radio commentator state, we shouldn't be willing to kill to celebrate the Eucharist, meaning, what happens if we contract the virus? How many others do we put at risk, from caregivers and medical personnel to family, friends and others we would come into contact with before we even knew we were infected.

Let's also not forget that many of our priests, both active and senior, who provide the Sacraments, are in the high-risk category. Let's also remember how incredibly difficult this is, especially for our younger priests and lay parish directors, who have never experienced their ability to pastor their people so severely diminished. There are times I wish I was still a simple, unknown, professor at Mundelein.

We cannot make decisions out of fear and we must use common sense in making decisions for the pastoral care of our people without taking unnecessary risk. So, after consultation with my Executive Council and the College of Consultors (both by teleconference) and my own deep reflection and prayer, I have come to some additional decisions about our liturgical and pastoral practices during this time of this pandemic. I know that you want information sooner rather than later, even though some of the following information will not be applicable for a few weeks, and much could change.

- Following directives for Holy Week from the Holy See, we will postpone the Chrism Mass until a later date. Once the pressing health crisis has passed, we will schedule the Chrism Mass and call for faithful to gather in thanksgiving. If you do not have a sufficient amount of oil on hand, the ritual of the anointing of the sick includes a blessing of the oil of the sick, which you are able to do.
- The suspension of public daily and Sunday Mass throughout the archdiocese continues in place. Priests may continue to celebrate Mass without a congregation. Streaming of Mass is possible and has been successfully adopted by some parishes.
- The distribution of Holy Communion is permitted only as Viaticum. Other practices of “private” distribution may not take place. This diminishes the Eucharist from its proper liturgical and theological context.
- April 1, was designated as a day for 12 hours of the Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout the archdiocese. This will be postponed. While private reconciliation is allowed, please consider the risk before scheduling confessions. We will provide formational material about how to make a good examination of conscience and a meaningful act of contrition.
- Holy Week and the Triduum are the most solemn time of our liturgical year. Public celebrations for Holy Week, Holy Thursday and Good Friday are canceled in all of our parishes. I will celebrate both days from the Cathedral and those services will be live-streamed. The modifications in the liturgical celebrations decreed by the Vatican will be observed. Instructions for accessing the live-stream will be posted. I will also offer the celebration of the Easter Vigil, as accommodated in the same Vatican decree, from the Cathedral. That Mass will be live-streamed.
- The baptisms of the Elect and the receptions into full communion across the archdiocese are postponed until a later diocesan-wide, common date. Please notify those in your RCIA of this news with the assurances that it is not a cancelation but rather a postponement.
- As beautiful and moving as it is, I must also request the cancelation of the celebration of the Via Crucis, due to the large numbers who gather for it.
- The suspension of public celebrations of the Eucharist continues for Easter Sunday. I will celebrate Easter Mass at the Cathedral and that Mass will either be live-streamed or broadcast over network television. Bishop Schuerman will also offer the Easter Mass from the Cathedral, in Spanish, and I will also be present for that. More information about these celebrations will be forthcoming.

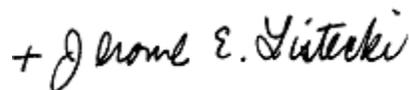
- Confirmations and First Communions are now postponed until the health crisis has passed. At that time, instructions will be provided for scheduling. Catechetical materials will be posted to assist parents in talking about this with their candidates and first communicants. For priests who have requested / would be requesting delegation to confirm already-baptized Catholics, that delegation is issued for a specific date. When the health crisis passes, you will need to request delegation when you have scheduled the new Confirmation date.
- I truly value our annual fraternal gathering, but the Spring Assembly of Priests is canceled. I am grateful to the Planning Committee for all of their hard work and am sorry we had to reach this decision. I am hopeful we may be able to arrange an alternative gathering before Fall Priest Day.
- With the suspension of Masses obviously comes the lack of offertory giving. The Stewardship and Development Office will be providing suggestions for maintaining offertory giving. Please encourage your parishioners to make use of on-line giving and electronic transfer of funds to assist the existence of their parish at this time of crisis.
- We know many of your parishioners are suffering financial hardship. As a sign of solidarity with all whose finances are uncertain, the priests' salaries will be frozen for 2020-2021, which is different than what was previously announced. Some priests have further determined that, given the financial uncertainty of parish staff, they will actually reduce their own salary as an act of generosity and sacrifice. They will do this until the crisis is over. I will also follow their example. I must also acknowledge that many of our senior priests are feeling the financial stress as Masses and other sacraments are not being celebrated by them as help-out priests. Many of them rely on this income to live day-to-day.
- The Love One Another Capital Campaign is being suspended. I hate to do so with such good initial response and momentum from the pilot parishes, but there is too much uncertainty at this time. We will work on communication with the Pilot Parishes and hopefully will be able to resume the campaign when there is a return to financial stability.
- Parish or school building projects should be put on hold. In general, this will be a building freeze. Proxy requests will still be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with regard to individual circumstances.
- With the new restrictions from Governor Evers, it will be a challenge to celebrate funerals the way people might like. You should encourage families to delay the rituals if at all possible. If there is no way to delay, they need to be cautious about keeping the number of people to a minimum and maintaining the proper social distancing between people. This is especially difficult at such a sensitive time.

- Fr. Jerry Herda has set up a private group page on Facebook – MKE Priests & Parish Directors. Please use that to stay connected and share best practices with one another regarding what you are doing to keep connected to your people and to one another. Call Fr. Jerry with any concerns, 414-588-4441. There are also a variety of resources on our website, including a new series of evangelization tools under Courageous Catholic. Visit www.archmil.org/courageouscommunion. All updates to parishes and schools are always posted on the website. Please visit www.archmil.org/coronavirus.
- Catholic Charities is grateful for the spiritual outreach of our priests, deacons and pastoral ministers to those faithful who are experiencing anxiety. Your witness through the use of social media and technology brings comfort to many, and exercises the ability to bring spiritual solace to our people who look to you for leadership.
- To keep us connected, I am going to arrange for either a telephone conference call or video Zoom call, for priests and parish directors, either at the end of this week or early next week. You will receive a separate email with instructions.
- Bishops Haines, Schuerman and I will continue to offer the daily video reflections. Please consider what means you can use to keep people connected during this time we must be apart. I know of the great sacrifice it is for people to observe these many restrictions, cancellations, and postponements. Let us encourage each other to join our suffering at this time to the suffering endured by our brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith.

During this unprecedented crisis in our recent world history, I want you to know that I am very proud to be your archbishop. I have no doubt of your courage and commitment to the faith. I have said a countless number of times that my greatest surprise upon arriving here in the archdiocese was experiencing the deep level of faith that has been cultivated over the years by the clergy, religious, lay ministers and faithful. It is this strength that I and we draw upon to guide us through this time. I am a believer and I know that our Lord is with us and that we are called always to testify to his presence in and through his Church. Know that you all remain in my thoughts and prayers during these difficult times. Let us remain models of hope for our people.

With the assurance of prayers, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

