



THE DIOCESE OF YAKIMA • PASTORAL OFFICE
LA DIÓCESIS DE YAKIMA • CENTRO PASTORAL

March 5, 2020

Dear Pastors, Priests, and Deacons:

The coronavirus is on the minds of everyone. Our response to this spreading virus must reflect how we, as followers of Jesus, express our love of God and neighbor. In caring for all members of our community – especially the elderly and the vulnerable – we are carrying out the mission of the church. It is with this pastoral focus and care for the common good that I am issuing the following directives to parishes in the Diocese of Yakima, effectively immediately, until further notice:

Love of Our Neighbors:

- Urge your parishioners to stay home if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness. Assure them that they are not obliged to attend Mass in this case. Instead, out of charity they should not attend. Encourage them to set aside time for prayer at home.
 - For any health-related guidance, please suggest people follow the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control at: bit.ly/3cBSaac
- Avoid hand-to-hand contact as much as possible. This includes:
 - Coming and going: Ask greeters to hold the door rather than shake people's hands.
 - The Lord's Prayer: People should not hold hands during the Our Father. The accompanying document offers a bit of catechesis on postures for the Lord's Prayer.
 - Sign of Peace: People should simply say, "Peace be with you," rather than shake hands.
- All holy water should be drained, including the baptismal font, until further notice. An exception can be made for people who wish to collect holy water for personal use from the holy water reservoir, provided this reservoir is a closed structure so people cannot place their hands in it. Please be generous in offering to bless water in containers that parishioners bring so that they can have Holy Water at home to use.
- Out of an abundance of precaution, and if church leadership feels they are in a high-risk environment, we recommend the option of disinfecting surfaces that people touch – like door handles, tops of pews and water fountains – after each Mass.

Communion:

- Urge everyone participating in the Mass to practice good hygiene. For ministers of holy Communion, this means washing hands before Mass begins and ideally before Communion. If hand washing is not possible, then use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer solution before and after distributing holy Communion. (Only if needed, the use of hand sanitizers, even during Mass, is acceptable for all ministers of holy Communion, including the priest and deacon.)
- Please refrain from the communal distribution of the Precious Blood until further notice.

- Communion hosts are to be received in the hand only and not on the tongue. The attached document offers some catechesis for this. Please consider reviewing it with parishioners both at the beginning of Mass and just before Communion is distributed. This may be a special challenge for our Hispanic parishioners, who are more likely to customarily receive communion on the tongue.
- For children or adults who wish to have a blessing, please make the sign of the cross in the air, rather than touching the individual. Instruct your lay communion ministers to simply say, "Peace be with you."
- After the necessary purification of the sacred vessels by the priest or deacon, the sacristans should wash the vessels with HOT, soapy water and then towel dry them. Consider using separate towels for each vessel, or at least new towels for each Mass.
- ****Note:** This washing by the sacristans should not take place until the sacred vessels have been carefully purified first, according to liturgical norms.

Power of Prayer:

Prayer is an important way Catholics respond to any crisis as we express our dependence on God for all salvation, temporal and eternal. We stand in solidarity with all those impacted by disease including people who are infected, their families, health workers and governments working to slow its spread. Ask parishioners to keep these people in mind while they pray. Specifically, recommend praying the rosary during Lent. Below are sample petitions for the Prayers of the Faithful, from the USCCB:

- For those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness, that they might be healed, and for the happy repose of all who have died from this sickness in recent weeks; let us pray to the Lord.
- For scientists, health professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good in this difficult and uncertain time, that they will be filled with wisdom and understanding; let us pray to the Lord.
- That in times of illness our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence; let us pray to the Lord.
- That our compassionate Father would touch all affected by the current outbreak with healing and peace; let us pray to the Lord.

As I mentioned, we have also prepared sample language that you can share with your parishioners as you alert them to these changes and respond to their questions. Thank you for your attention to these directives, which I share with a pastoral urgency to ensure the safety and health of the vulnerable in our community.

Fraternally yours in Christ,



Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima

[signature electronically applied]