

March 6, 2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Every house of worship, every school, every public gathering place, every diocese and denomination are now making plans and publishing statements due to fears of the Coronavirus-19, COVID-19. Our bishop and the Diocese of Pennsylvania is no different. Last night Bishop Gutierrez put out a statement which can be found [HERE](#). With an abundance of caution the country is preparing for the worse and facts are changing quickly. For this reason, St. Mary's will have a plan in place. However, I would like to quote the bishop in saying, "It has been written that the coronavirus is the epidemic, fear is the pandemic." He then gives us a variety of suggestions, many of which coming from the Diocese of Olympia, in Washington State which has been hit hard by COVID-19. I've been in touch with our bishop and he assures me that his letter was not a directive and trusts each individual community to make decisions which are best for them.

According to the [CDC website](#), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, whose site is updated at noon and 4:00 each weekday, currently there are 167 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the United States found in 19 states with 11 deaths. No doubt we can expect high population states like Pennsylvania in general and cities like Philadelphia in particular to report confirmed cases of COVID-19 soon. I saw a report earlier today saying there were two likely cases in our area and since I began writing this letter, those two cases were confirmed. Needless to say, information will be fluid. And while most of us will be fine even if we do contract the COVID-19 virus, we must admit a good portion of our population of churchgoers fall into the category of vulnerable.

For this reason, we will take some precautions. Remember, this is not an airborne disease but rather it is transmitted by touch and saliva. If you are not feeling well or if you are coughing or sneezing, please stay home for your sake as well as for the sake of others. If you would like communion brought to you, send me an email or give me a phone call and I will be there. I will come to your home and administer the sacraments. Here are some tips that can help us minimize exposure when worshipping at St. Mary's.

- Please, do not intinct. Intinction is the action of dipping the bread in the wine at a Eucharist so that a communicant receives both elements together. There are more germs passed through intinction than any other way as fingertips inadvertently touch the wine. It's important to remember that receiving the host only is fully receiving the Holy Eucharist.
- Those administering bread and the wine will not only wash their hands before the Eucharist, they will also use hand sanitizer immediately before assisting in administering to the congregation.
- During oblations, any leftover wine will be placed on the credence table and the altar guild will pour any excess down the piscina after the liturgy.
- During the Peace, as you greet one another in the name of the Lord, if you would like to be cautious, wave or bump elbows.
- The passing of the collection plates will be handled by ushers only. Please do not assist in the process.

Brothers and sisters, Fear not! Much more harm is occurring because of hype and anxiety. Ultimately what each individual does or doesn't do is up to them and their anxiety level and comfort zone. But please remember to be considerate to others if you are not feeling well. Don't power through things. Take the day off. We will continue to make changes as circumstances dictate and we will let you know through emails and announcements in church. Pray for one another. Check on the vulnerable. Be calm and try not to contribute to the anxiety of others. In short, continue being a blessing to one another. Continue being the body of Christ, St. Mary's.

Yours in Christ,  
Joseph+