



March 13, 2020

Coronavirus Precautions

Bishop Warfel and the Chancery Staff continue to regularly monitor the situation in Montana with regard to coronavirus. At this time, there no confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Montana. Should this situation change, the Diocese will follow what the State of Montana determines (regarding gatherings of people, for example). The Diocese will notify you by email and watch our Website and the Diocesan Facebook page of any future changes, cancellations, or restrictions.

There is no reason to panic; take the sensible precautions recommended for one who has a cold or the flu. At this time, **no Diocesan gatherings have been cancelled.**

1. Preventative Measures — Effective Immediately

As we have noted before, the most important way to prevent this disease is to maintain proper hygiene practices.

- a. covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow
- b. washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (pray the Lord's prayer for those who are sick) or using hand sanitizer;
- c. keeping hands away from the face, especially the mouth, nose and eyes
- d. and, most importantly, Catholics have a moral obligation to **stay home when sick.**

2. Operational Responses - Should we enter a state of emergency whereby our diocesan entities are impacted by a health risk as determined by local, state or federal governments, the following will serve as the Diocesan response procedure.

a. Parishes – Directives

- i. Parish offices should follow the response procedure recommended by the Diocese as to the operation and/or closing of a parish office.
- ii. In the instances where a parish office closure occurs on the basis of disease prevention:
 1. Employees will be paid their normal working rate and hours during the authorized closure.
 2. Custodial staff will be provided safety wear and cleaning materials to conduct a disinfecting/deep clean of the premises prior to the reopening of the parish. Pastors should prepare for this. See the CDC Faith Based Disease cleaning recommendations.
- iii. Please keep the Chancery informed of any local closures. Questions should be forwarded to the Chancellor (chancellor@diocesegfb.org)

b. Diocesan Schools – Directives

- i. Operations of diocesan schools will follow the response procedure of their public school counterparts, on a county-by-county basis.
 1. Public school closures for the purpose of disease prevention in a county with a diocesan school will result in that diocesan's school closure.

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2. Follow all recommendations made by your local or the state Health Departments that apply to schools.
 - ii. In the instance where a diocesan school closure occurs on the basis of disease prevention:
 1. Employees will be paid their normal working rate and hours during the authorized closure.
 2. Custodial staff will be provided necessary safety wear and cleaning materials to conduct a disinfecting/deep clean of the premise prior to the reopening of the school. Schools should prepare for this.
 - iii. Questions on School directives should be forwarded to the Superintendent of Schools (superintendent@montanacc.org)

c. The Chancery – Directives

- i. Regardless of the operational capacity of Diocesan parishes and schools, The Chancery will remain operational. In exceptional situations, a decision to close the Chancery would be made by the Bishop.
 - ii. In the event the Chancery closes for disease prevention, personnel will be available onsite or remotely including, The Bishop, Chancellor, and Fiscal Officer.
 1. All other salary-exempt personnel will work remotely to the extent possible.
 2. Employees will be paid their normal working rate and hours during the authorized closure.
 - iii. Questions should be forwarded to the Chancellor
3. **Liturgical Directives – Effective Immediately** - Bishop Warfel is responsible for promoting, regulating, and being vigilant over the liturgical life in this diocese. As such, he is instituting some reasonable precautions as preventative steps to help our faith communities, and the region as a whole, address this threat and stay healthy. The following directives will apply until further notice:
- a. Distribution of the Precious Blood during the Eucharist is temporarily suspended; Communion under the host should be done according to the previous letter.
 - b. Holy water fonts should be cleaned and drained on a weekly basis. As a reminder anyone can bless themselves without the holy water;
 - c. Collection baskets, if at all possible, should not be passed. (I recommend placing a collection basket before the altar with parishioners processing, as in the communion rite, to place their offering in the basket);
 - d. The exchange of the Sign of Peace through physical contact (typically a handshake) is temporarily suspended -- an alternate means of signifying peace should be utilized;
 - e. Remind everyone: If one is sick or experiencing symptoms of sickness (including cold or flu) they are not obliged to attend Mass – indeed, out of charity, they should not attend Mass or other parish gatherings. This includes our priests and deacons as well.
 - f. No holding hands at any time during Mass.
4. **Please Remember** - Those who are in high risk groups, those in care facilities, sick or begin to feel ill are **not** obligated to attend Sunday Mass. In the interest of the health of the parish community if a parishioner is ill, they are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass and should stay home until they are well.

We will continue to communicate more information as it becomes available. Please continue to monitor your email, the diocesan web site for updates and helpful informational resources.