



BISHOP OF GARY

March 13, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During this time of challenge and uncertainty, I want to encourage us to remain faithful servants, who are full of hope as we proclaim Jesus as Lord. While the outbreak of this virus is unsettling, let us not despair, but join together in prayer for all affected. We live in a time in which "social distance" may be necessary as a health precaution, but this does not have to result in "spiritual distance." We are one family of faith in the diocese of Gary. As the body of Christ, *"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it."* (1 Cor 12:26)

As people of prayer, we are never alone or helpless. We can use our blessings to serve others by what we do and what we do not do. In this particular instance, it is prudent for us to do what we can to thwart the spread of this virus. In this regard, we must use good judgement and heed the advice of health care officials.

Please know that our diocesan leadership continues to closely monitor the CDC and the Indiana Department of Public Health regarding the coronavirus. In response to recommendations from these officials, the Diocese of Gary issued specific guidelines to help prevent and minimize spread of the virus in our Northwest Indiana community.

Parishes are following specific liturgical guidelines to minimize exposure to illness. The faithful who may be ill, or who are vulnerable to infection due to age or other factors (CDC.gov), are asked to refrain from attending Mass. For the well-being of all, worshipers are asked to avoid physical contact with others during Mass. In addition, parishes are temporarily suspending the distribution of the Precious Blood during Eucharist.

While at this time there are no documented cases in any of the four counties served by the diocese, being proactive can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, I am dispensing the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for the weekends of March 14-15, March 21-22 and March 28-29. Mass will continue to be celebrated across the diocese, however some parishes may adjust their liturgical schedule. All are encouraged to check with local parishes to confirm Mass times.

For those who refrain from attending Mass due to the dispensation, this does not remove the obligation to keep the Lord's Day holy, which requires that we seek to refrain from work, increase our love of the Lord and extend charity to others through prayer and service. Additional spiritual and devotional practices can be found on our website (www.dcgary.org). Daily readings can be found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org). You may also watch Mass on television or through websites.

Prudence and caution do not mean fear and despair. Times of uncertainty are an opportunity for us to remind ourselves of the essentials: Jesus loves us and he calls us to love our brothers and sisters. God has us in the palm of His Hand. Loss and change can give us a renewed appreciation for routines and people we take for granted.

I invite you to pray for the many healthcare professionals who are working diligently to treat those affected and eradicate this virus. Let us pray for all who are vulnerable to illness and for those who are sick, that they may experience comfort and healing. Let us also lift up in prayer all who have died because of the Coronavirus. May they and their loved ones know the peace and love of Christ.

I was blessed to be ordained and installed as your bishop on February 11 - the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, also celebrated in the church as the World Day of the Sick. I once again entrust and consecrate our diocese to Our Lady of Lourdes. The Blessed Mother intercedes for us to her son Jesus. Let us pray for her continued intercession during these days for healing and comfort to those suffering.

Jesus, I trust in you...

Your Servant,

The Most Reverend Robert J. McClory
Bishop
Diocese of Gary