

Diocese of Santa Rosa Response to the Coronavirus

NOTE: *Adapted from the response issued by the Diocese of Orange*

In response to the current crisis surrounding the Coronavirus, we acknowledge the legitimacy of fears and the need to exercise an abundance of caution in order to minimize the risk of infection and to save lives. At the same time, we recognize the need to exercise our faith and to act in a way consistent with calm attentiveness to prudence, public health and prayer.

The recommendation that non-essential gatherings of more than 250 persons be restricted has been heard and while the Bishops recognize the threat of infection, we also recognize the need and desire for the faithful to maintain, without undue risk, an ability to pray and worship, especially on Sunday.

We can and must acknowledge the scientific facts surrounding the spread of the Coronavirus, including the importance of thorough washing of hands, “social distancing” and “flattening the curve” by restricting the rate and extent of the spread of the virus. These measures not only protect us they protect our neighbors and especially those who are most vulnerable. Thus, we ought not take actions that put others at risk unnecessarily. There are many ways to see to help during this time as we seek to care for our neighbors: Checking in on elderly neighbors even if by phone or from a distance, offering help with groceries or childcare for dear ones who might struggle with increased burdens.

With the above in mind, all pastors/administrators and directors are to take note of and ensure that the following be implemented:

1. Until further notice, the Diocesan Bishop hereby dispenses from the obligation to attend in Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (cf. canons 85, 87 §1, 90 §1 and 1247 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law) for all the faithful of the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Those faithful who wish to avoid crowded areas, out of legitimate concern for their health and/or the health of others, are encouraged to take advantage of this dispensation. Those faithful who elect this additional precaution should set aside some time on Sunday for prayer or an on-line experience of Holy Mass.
2. Since the needs of the Church continue even with this dispensation, those who choose not to attend Mass are to keep in mind their duty to continue to assist with financial support of the Church, in accordance with canons 222 §1 and 1261 of the same Code of Canon Law.
3. Parishes with the ability to live-stream Masses are encouraged to do so.
4. The church is to be sanitized on a regular basis with even greater care than usual.
5. Holy water is to be removed from fonts and the baptistery is either to be emptied or covered so that the faithful will not have access to water inside of it.
6. Masses may be simple, with little or no music and very limited or no homily, in the interest of limiting “exposure” time. Limiting petitions, eliminating, for now, the Offertory Procession, and use of Eucharistic Prayer II are other ways to minimize “exposure” time.
7. People should be encouraged to physically distance themselves from each other as much as possible, use personal hand sanitizers before coming forward for Holy Communion and limiting hand contact with others, with pews, pew missals or other items frequently touched by others. The practice of ‘stamping’ children’s “attendance records” should be temporarily discontinued.

8. Some have expressed concern about distributing Holy Communion on the tongue. There are disagreements about whether there is a greater chance to transmit the Coronavirus via inadvertent contact with the tongue. While acknowledging the legitimate desire on the part of some of the faithful to receive on the tongue, in light of the serious risk of transmission, pastors are to instruct the faithful that they are to receive Holy Communion in the hand for now. Moreover, priests might wish to remind the faithful that they are under no obligation to receive Holy Communion every time they attend Mass (cf. canon 920).
9. Please be mindful of how the collection is carried out, especially as regards the passing of baskets. Other creative methods for taking up the collection might be considered.
10. In regards to other parish-related events (i.e. Stations of the Cross, Penance Services, Fund-Raisers) pastors/administrators/directors have the authority to cancel them or not. Consultation with local healthcare providers is recommended in making local decisions. No one is to be penalized, however, for not attending religious education classes or even a confirmation retreat (that is to say, one who cannot make a retreat due to its cancelation or his/her concern for health safety would not be denied confirmation for this reason alone). As regards “non-essential” events, please refer to Governor Newsom’s statement dated 11 March 2020 at: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/03/11/california-public-health-experts-mass-gatherings-should-be-postponed-or-canceled-statewide-to-slow-the-spread-of-covid-19/>
11. Additional instructions for Holy Week liturgies, if necessary, will be considered and communicated in due course.
12. Parish schools will follow the lead of public schools. Plans are already in place to provide on-line education in the case of the temporary closure of schools.

In addition to encouraging fasting and prayer, priests should consider using the prayer offered by His Holiness, Pope Francis, during the Wednesday audience held on March 11, 2020:

*O Mary,
you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You, Salvation of the Roman People,
know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.*

*Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God.
Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial,
but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin*