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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 16, 2020

Dear Priests and Deacons,

In order to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community, I am mandating the suspension of all public Masses in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, beginning with Masses following this communication today, March 16, 2020. Pending updates and guidance from local and state government and health officials, we have preliminary plans to resume Masses beginning April 6; however, we will re-evaluate at a later date.

At this time, all churches are to remain open to individuals for personal prayer, devotions and confessions.

As with my directive on March 15 to close schools, this decision has not been made lightly. However, caring for both our physical and spiritual health go hand-in-hand, and the health, safety and overall well-being of the people of the archdiocese is my first priority.

Please review new details and guidelines below, to be implemented immediately and maintained through April 5, 2020, pending further updates:

- **All public celebrations of the liturgy, as well as Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, and all other group services, Bible studies and activities are to cease beginning immediately.** The dispensation I have offered for all Catholics in our archdiocese from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is now extended through April 5.
- The duty for priests is to continue celebrating **Masses “sine populo”**, and should include the assistance of at least one other adult minister if possible. No more than four ministers should be gathered for this purpose.
- The **intentions** for all Masses celebrated sine populo should be re-assigned as “missas pro populo” — Masses offered for the people. Please work to reschedule the original intentions of these Masses for a future Mass at a later date, if possible.
- Please work with your parish staff and lay members to offer **live-streamed Masses** where possible. A live stream can be accomplished by broadcasting the Mass with a smartphone or tablet to social media streaming tools. While live-streaming and televised options are available through our Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis, offerings through local parishes are preferred for our parish communities. As you develop and schedule these live-streams, please share the times of those Masses and how to view them with your parish and the Office of Communications and Planning (communications@archstl.com). The Archdiocese of St. Louis will assist you in trying to reach a greater audience with the information.

- **Eucharistic Adoration:** Decisions regarding whether to continue operation of adoration chapels should be determined by the pastor. However, the exposed Blessed Sacrament is never to be left unattended. If necessary, the Blessed Sacrament may be reposed in the tabernacle at least two times during a period of adoration. Please take care to implement the most recent social distancing guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ensuring that no more than 10 individuals are gathered in Eucharistic adoration at one time.
- **Weddings/funerals/baptisms:** The decisions regarding whether to continue with weddings and funerals remain with the parish pastor. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends limiting attendance at these sacred events to immediate family members only – or rescheduling. Parish pastors should determine whether to continue with baptisms. Where possible, the Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends that baptisms be conducted in a simple, private, individual ceremony.
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** It is recommended that the Sacrament of Penance be celebrated using a screen (anonymously) to ensure the health department’s social distancing guidelines. If a penitent prefers to offer a confession face-to-face, the chair of the penitent should be placed approximately six feet from the confessor. This may require holding confessions in a different location than usual.
- **Holy Communion:** may still be administered by clergy in Masses sine populo, following the guidelines of my previous letter, which is attached to this email. Holy Communion may also be distributed outside of Mass at times determined by the pastor. All ministers, ordinary and extraordinary, delivering Holy Communion to the elderly, sick or homebound need to be in good health.
- **Anointing of the Sick:** may still be administered by priests to those seriously ill or in danger of death. However, priests administering this sacrament need to be in good health. If you are administering to someone with COVID-19, please contact the Office of Worship ahead of time.
- All those administering sacraments to the elderly, sick or homebound need to follow proper protocols from the [CDC](#) for handwashing and use of masks by those infected and those who are ministering.
- **Collections:** Please remind parishioners that collections remain essential to the continued operation of our parishes and their missions. Encourage them to use online giving, drop-off or mail their contributions.
- **Charitable giving:** The Archdiocese of St. Louis understands the economic impact that this emergency is having on so many individuals in our parishes, as well as on our community as a whole. However, in times like this, it is even more urgent for us to assist our brothers and sisters who are in the most need. We encourage you to consider supporting organizations that are responding to this crisis, such as [Catholic Charities of St. Louis](#), [The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of St. Louis](#) and the [Annual Catholic Appeal](#).
- **Assisting individuals in need:** Please continue to work to support individuals who depend on parish charitable efforts for food and other necessities. You may refer parishioners and others who request assistance to The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of St. Louis: dial 2-1-1; and/or Catholic Charities of St. Louis: dial (314) 367-5500 or email info@ccstl.org

- Please note the following:
 - **Society of St. Vincent de Paul operations:** Person-to-person home visits are temporarily suspended, but the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conferences are still taking calls. SVdP's goal is to keep as many food pantries functioning as possible with altered procedures such as porch deliveries, bagging and picking up food, and distributing food vouchers or gift cards to those in need. Those in need should call 2-1-1.
 - **Catholic Charities of St. Louis operations:** All Catholic Charities agencies continue to review services as recommended by health officials. Some services are being modified, and some non-critical services have been postponed. Catholic Charities is also working with the archdiocese and community partners to develop additional community relief efforts. If an individual is in need of services from a Catholic Charities agency, please refer them to the agency website (ccstl.org), to call the Catholic Charities office at (314) 367-5500 or to email info@ccstl.org.

My support and prayers continue to remain with you as we navigate the challenges of this national emergency. The Archdiocese of St. Louis will continue to support you, and we ask for your continued prayers and support in return.

Please refer to my previous letter, attached to this email, for my additional mandates and guidelines that remain in place. Also, as a reminder, the latest public statements and information from the archdiocese regarding COVID-19 can be found at archstl.org/coronavirus.

Mary, Health of the Sick and our Mother, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Carlson", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson
Archbishop of St. Louis

The Office of Communications and Planning encourages you to monitor the social media accounts of Archbishop Robert J. Carlson, the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the St. Louis Review for the most up to date information regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

Archbishop Robert J. Carlson [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)

Archdiocese of St. Louis [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)

St. Louis Review [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)