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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 13, 2020

Dear Priests and Deacons,

During this challenging time, we turn to our Lord Jesus Christ and our Blessed Mother in prayer, especially for those who are sick or vulnerable, and for those who care for them. As shepherds, we are called to encourage our archdiocesan community to pray, and I ask you to do so by implementing and sharing the prayer that USCCB gave us today regarding COVID-19. Please find the prayer attached to this email.

It is important that we act prudently, but without panic. As such, to be implemented immediately, I am adding the following directives to the [mandated measures](#) I shared earlier this week for all parishes within the Archdiocese of St. Louis:

- All Catholics within the Archdiocese of St. Louis are dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass for the next three weekends (March 14-15, March 21-22 and March 28-29). As with the Lenten practice of abstinence, we remind the faithful to exercise good judgement and not “excuse themselves lightly” from their obligation. **Churches will remain open, and Mass schedules will remain mostly unchanged.** Please be aware of the recommendations of crowd size from the City of St. Louis (no more than 1,000 people) and St. Louis County (no more than 250 people) and make adjustments as you can. It would be good to keep daily Masses available as they are generally not as crowded and parishioners can keep adequate distances apart. We will continue to monitor official health advisories and update these directives accordingly.
- **We urge everyone who is sick, elderly or vulnerable because of a medical condition to remain at home.** Please understand that Mass schedules and availability, as well as parish and diocesan events, may change—especially if our clergy are affected by illness. Please update your parish website with any scheduling or other changes, and tell your parishioners to check the parish website for those updates. Please consult the Archdiocese of St. Louis regarding any major decisions of concern for your parish.
- Catholics who attend Holy Mass are not required to receive Holy Communion more than once per year. No one is under any obligation to receive nor distribute Holy Communion. Catholics who choose to temporarily refrain from receiving Holy Communion may make an act of Spiritual Communion, uniting themselves worthily to our Lord’s true presence in the Most Holy Eucharist through prayer. Please share more information with your parishioners regarding how to make a Spiritual Communion.

Please communicate this to your parishioners: **We strongly recommend that parishioners receive Holy Communion in the hand**. Holy Communion distributed by **extraordinary ministers** will be administered in the **hand only**. However, as this is a celebration of God's love for us and the most important part of our Mass, **parishioners who still wish to receive Holy Communion on the tongue should receive from the Mass celebrant or concelebrant only**. Any of our faithful who decide to receive on the tongue should not be refused by the Mass celebrant or concelebrant.

- Continue to suspend the physical exchange of the sign of peace. Use a hand gesture or bow instead. Consider suspending the sign of peace altogether during this time. You can omit the words "Let us offer each other the sign of peace."
- Some of our parishes have the ability to webcast their Masses. Please work with your information technology specialists to ramp up these offerings. As you schedule these web-streams, please share the times of those Masses and how to view those Masses with your parish staff and the Office of Communications and Planning ([communications@archstl.com](mailto:communications@archstl.com)). The Archdiocese of St. Louis will assist you in trying to reach a greater audience with your web-streaming options. Remind your parishioners that Holy Mass can also be viewed on TV or online at [catholictv.org](http://catholictv.org), [EWTN](http://EWTN.com), and [the Catholic Faith Network](http://theCatholicFaithNetwork.com).
- **Weddings/Funerals/Baptisms:** The decision regarding whether to continue with weddings and funerals should be made by the parish pastor. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends limiting attendance at these sacred events to immediate family members only, or rescheduling to a future date when possible. Parish pastors should determine whether to continue with baptisms. Where possible, the Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends postponing baptisms to a later date.
- **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.
- **Parish fish fries:** The decision regarding whether to continue with fish fries should be made by pastors. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends limiting your fish fry to pick-up or drive-through options only, or where possible, canceling the fish fries until further notice.
- **Parish retreats and other group parish activities:** The decision regarding whether to continue with retreats and other group parish activities should be made by parish pastors. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recommends postponing retreats and other group activities/gatherings until further notice.

- Collections: Essential to the continued operation of our parishes and their missions, please encourage parishioners to use online giving, drop-off or mail their contributions.

Please know that my prayers for you as shepherds of your flocks continue in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Archdiocese of St. Louis will continue to support you in all challenges that this current situation presents. God be with you as we navigate these difficult waters and look forward to the peace and stability offered to us in the Resurrection of Our Lord.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name 'Robert J. Carlson' in a cursive script.

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](#)*