



+March 10, 2020

Dear Parish and School leadership,

Peace be with all of you. Today, as we embrace our solidarity with the universal Church, especially, and the Church in Rome, I'd like to open with a quote from Pope Francis from his Sunday Angelus a few days ago:

"I am close in prayer to all people suffering from the current coronavirus epidemic and to all those who care for them ... I join my brother bishops in encouraging the faithful to live this difficult moment with the strength of faith, the certainty of hope and the fervor of charity... The season of Lent helps us all to give an evangelical sense also to this moment of trial and pain." Pope Francis, March 8, 2020

Like you, we continue to track the constantly-changing situation with the coronavirus outbreak and how it may impact our communities. Moving forward, my letters will be written for all parish and school leadership to ensure everyone is informed on the latest guidance from the Archdiocese of Seattle. These letters may be shared and posted on your website if you believe that would be helpful for your community. You may also access the latest information, resources and eventually, ways to support your neighbor on the home page of www.seattlearchdiocese.org.

This past weekend we received several questions and gathered additional information for you. As always, if you have suggestions, best practices, questions or feel your community may be at risk for the coronavirus, please reach out to Nick Schoen at the Office of Vicar for Clergy (Nicholas.Schoen@seattlearch.org | 206-472-3052).

Before I share the new guidance, I want to inform you that Father Nagel from Holy Family Kirkland is doing well. He wrote:

"It's been eight days, now, since I anointed a person who turned out to have the coronavirus and I self-quarantined. I feel great so far – no symptoms. It's difficult not to be with the parishioners for mass and their other needs. But I guess God wanted me to have a more solitary Lent than I had planned. But that's not all bad. There's plenty of time for prayer and catching up on reading. In fact, when I mention by phone to other priests that I'm required to stay at home all day by myself, quiet, reading, not on for anything – I sense a certain envy in their responses. But I am looking forward to it coming to an end.

That being said, I don't regret the quarantine as a consequence of my anointing that dying parishioner. Now that we've developed protocols with the health authorities concerning how to anoint with proper cautions so as to avoid quarantines, I will surely follow those guidelines. But administering the sacraments of anointing and confession to the dying has to go on, especially at a time like this."

Here is an overview of key issues for this week:

Parish Ministries and Gatherings other than Mass

We encourage every parish community to closely follow the requests of local health authorities.

At this time, **King County** and **Shohomish County** health officials are advising against larger group gatherings. Local (and national) public health authorities have specifically recommended "to avoid large gatherings and events," especially for people at high-risk, which include people over 60, people with health conditions, people with compromised immune systems, and pregnant women, among others. Out of protection for the people who are at high-risk and to ensure we are doing our part to slow the spread of the virus for the common good, we recommend postponing any large *non-essential* ministry gatherings and parish events. Public health applies this to groups larger than 10 people. Non-essential refers to activities like Friday Fish Fries, movie screenings, or mixed group ministry meetings (involving people from diverse backgrounds). It does *not* apply to liturgical celebrations like Mass, Adoration, Stations of the Cross, or scheduled Confessions and Lenten Penance Rites.

CYO Sports

Since CYO sports involves children, we are following the same guidance for Catholic Schools, which is following the recommendations from Public Health King County and Seattle Public Schools. At this time, Seattle Public Schools has begun canceling large group events including competitions. Due to this, we will be canceling our Volleyball and Basketball games in King and Snohomish Counties for this upcoming weekend.

However, since Seattle Public Schools has not recommended wide spread closure of schools, we believe our parish communities may continue offering CYO practices in their own gym. This would allow student athletes to continue playing and learning the sport, but in an environment that mimics the school day and does not bring together large groups of people. For this, we rely on the discretion of the principal and pastor to make the decision for their community – given the rapidly changing nature of local public health recommendations.

At this time, CYO Baseball is scheduled to kick-off this weekend. Since this is an outdoor sport, we will move forward with the season opening this weekend and will monitor guidance from local public health regarding outdoor sports like this.

Sunday Mass

Until we are mandated to do so by government officials, we will continue to publically celebrate Sunday Mass throughout the Archdiocese of Seattle. Please urge people who don't feel well, who are caretakers or considered to be "high risk" to stay home. This includes people who live with a vulnerable individual. This is an opportunity to explain to people that any person self-selects to stay home from all public gatherings and activities (including Mass) for reasons of coronavirus concern is *temporarily dispensed* from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass until the coronavirus danger lessens. The normal obligation to attend Sunday Mass *will resume* when

they re-engage in other public gatherings or activities. This dispensation extends to those who are ill, a caretaker or considered to be high risk of getting sick. Please see the separate list of resources that you can share with them so they can remain active in their spiritual lives when they cannot participate in Sunday Mass.

Preparing the Worship Space of the Church

All parishes in the Archdiocese are asked to observe some heightened sanitization and hygiene standards at this time.

We are grateful for all the parish staff, volunteers and others who helped prepare and sanitize our churches across the archdiocese for Mass last week. In addition to increased cleaning, we recommend taking the following actions to minimize the spread of viruses and germs:

- Join the Property & Construction webinar on facilities work practices related to the Coronavirus this Thursday, March 12th at 9am. Please use the following link to join the webinar: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2382898289065912587>
- Parishioners should make every effort to observe the highest standards of hygiene. That means not touching your face, wiping your nose or cough during Mass. If you do, please use a cloth or tissue and step out of Mass so to carefully wash your hands.
- Ask all Eucharistic Ministers to discretely leave to wash their hands during the Offertory. This ensures their hands are clean prior to Communion.
- Priests and deacons should observe the highest hygienic standards at all times prior to and during the celebration of the Mass.
- Please remove music books from the pews. These commonly-handled items can serve to inadvertently transmit viruses from one person to the next.
- Please remove paper in the pews (like Pew Art cards or comment cards).
- Please do not hand out paper Order of Worship guides that are reused at other Masses. Either print guides for single use – or go without the paper Mass guide.
- Ask ushers to only use a collection basket on a stick, which limits the number of hands touching the basket. If your parish does not have such a basket, ask your parishioners to drop their collection into a stationary basket, held by an usher, on their way out of Mass or encourage your parishioners to enroll in the parish's EFT or online giving program.
- Ask all money counters to wear disposable gloves for collection counts.

Anointing Kits

This notice is for those priests who may be called on to offer the Anointing of the Sick to any homebound person manifesting possible symptoms of coronavirus. Please read carefully.

We have received good advice from Public Health at King County regarding steps to take for providing the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to people who have Covid-19. However, we have a limited supply of the personal protection equipment they recommend. We are therefore going to select a few priests from each region who will be designated to provide this sacrament in a homebound situation. If you are interested, please contact Nick Schoen who will be providing the training on the proper use of the personal protection equipment that will be included in their "Anointing Kits." As we get more equipment, we will expand this list of priests, however, we are limiting this to priests who are under age 60 at this time.

Please note, this specific anointing protocol *only applies to homebound people* who are showing signs of the coronavirus or have tested positive for it. Hospitals, nursing homes and adult family homes already have a clear and effective process in place so priests will not have to self-quarantine after anointing someone with the coronavirus in a hospital setting.

Baptism

All parishes in the Archdiocese of Seattle are asked to observe some temporary practical norms concerning the Sacrament of Baptism until the coronavirus is contained.

While baptisms are not commonly celebrated during Lent, they are still possible based on pastoral urgency. However, in order to limit any potential spread of germs or virus to a vulnerable population, we recommend against any “immersion” baptisms. Instead, please use fresh water that has been blessed for the Baptism and immediately drain it after the baptism. If there are several babies or people who will be baptized, do not reuse the same water. Have a pitcher or basin with enough freshly blessed water in it to pour on each person’s head.

Confession

This advisory is for any priest who is concerned about the possible transmission of the coronavirus.

During Lent, we especially want to offer people the opportunity to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Providing this sacrament is an important and essential way in which we minister the healing and merciful love of God. Even though we are in a heightened health alert state, the conditions do not yet exist for general absolution. Therefore, we will continue to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation on an individual basis only.

We understand the concerns around the tight space of a confessional. To help minimize the risk of exposure, we recommend considering the following actions should anyone be concerned about possible transmission of the coronavirus:

- Temporarily move out of the confessional if it is in a tight space and provide the Sacrament of Confession in a larger room where a confidential conversation can be held.
- If possible, we recommend using a screen to block the air flow between priest and penitent. The penitent should always have the option of confessing their sins anonymously.
- Ensure at least 6 feet of space between the priest and penitent.
- We advise using a chair without arm rests or cleansing the arm rests with a sanitizer between each person. You may also consider providing this sacrament in such a way that the penitent remains standing so to ensure proper distance while minimizing the surfaces that are touched.

Remember to Pray

As Pope Francis reminds us, we should be reaching out to our communities and praying in solidarity with the Church around the world. In his Mass today he said,

“Let us pray to the Lord also for our priests, that they may have the courage to go out and go to the sick people to bring the strength of God's word and the Eucharist and accompany the health workers and volunteers in this work that they are doing.”

In solidarity with the Pope and Catholics around the world, we offer these Prayers of the Faithful:

- For all those around the world suffering from the coronavirus, especially in the countries of China, Korea Italy, and Iran, that they may receive strength and healing from the hand of Christ and compassion and ministry from the Church.
- For health workers and volunteers around the world who are on the front lines treating patients and their families, that the Lord will protect them from harm as they minister the Lord's healing and compassion for others.

Let's continue to pray for everyone involved – especially as we continue our Lenten journey.

Thank you for your diligence in these matters.
With every best wish and an assurance of prayer, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

+ *Daniel Mueggenborg*

Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg



Holy Mary, we come before you as spiritual children in great need, seeking your intercession, and asking that your mantle of love surround us to console, protect, and lead us to your son Jesus.

We entrust all of God's family, especially the church in Western Washington, into your immaculate hands. With your son Jesus' gentle power you can *undo any knot* in our church, and in the lives of believers who entrust themselves to your care.

Today I especially entrust to you [*mention request/ Coronavirus here*], and I ask that — through your intercession, and that of St. James, our guardian angels, and the faithful in our archdiocese — we may be free from every spiritual and temporal ill, and be safely led to encounter your son's merciful, sacred heart.

Our Lady of Seattle, Undoer of Knots, pray for us!