



## Catholic Diocese of Evansville

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# Evansville Diocese takes additional steps to prevent spread of Coronavirus

**EVANSVILLE, INDIANA – March 13, 2020** – In an effort to prevent the spread and minimize the impact of COVID-19, also known as Coronavirus, the Diocese of Evansville is announcing additional actions. In exercising an abundance of caution, the diocese is following directives announced March 12, 2020, by Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb and county health department officials.

Please email questions about any of this information to [communications@evdio.org](mailto:communications@evdio.org), and they will be routed to the appropriate diocesan department for response.

In making this announcement, Evansville Bishop Joseph M. Siegel urges all to continue to pray especially for the sick, healthcare providers, public health officials and all community leaders during the weeks to come.

The diocese is taking the following actions:

### **Catholic Schools – through at least April 6, 2020**

- Catholic schools in Vanderburgh County will close for two weeks beginning at 5 p.m. Friday March 13, 2020. Catholic schools in Posey County will close for three weeks beginning at 5 p.m. Friday, March 13, 2020. E-Learning days will be used. School closures in other Diocese of Evansville counties will be addressed on a county-by-county basis in collaboration with county health departments across the diocese.
- **Effective immediately**, all extracurricular meetings, school-sponsored events, fundraisers, field trips and non-essential meetings are **cancelled through Monday April 6, 2020**. The Catholic Schools Office will reassess the situation at that time.

### **Catholic Parishes – through at least April 6, 2020**

- Parish offices remain open under their normal business hours.
- Parish Mass and other sacramental schedules remain in effect as usual. If you are ill, you are excused from attending Mass. **However, Bishop Siegel has issued a dispensation**

**from the obligation of Mass attendance on Sundays and Holydays for all the faithful in the diocese and travelers present in the diocese. Members of the faithful who are elderly, particularly those with underlying health conditions, and those with a comprised immune system or who are ill are encouraged to take advantage of this dispensation. Those who take advantage of this dispensation are encouraged to pray at home and/or watch a televised Mass if possible.**

- It is strongly recommended that parishes cancel religious education and RCIA classes, youth and young adult ministry events and meetings of parish committees effective immediately on Friday March 13, 2020.
- It is strongly recommended that parishes cancel special events, including those scheduled and/or sponsored by parish ministries, effective immediately on Friday March 13, 2020. Examples include – but are not limited to – meetings of parish committees, parish fish fries and other fundraisers. **NOTE – On March 12, 2020, Gov. Holcomb announced the immediate cancellation of all non-essential gatherings larger than 250 people, statewide.**
- **All parish events listed above are to be cancelled without exception effective at 8 a.m. local time on Monday March 16, 2020. To reiterate, these include – but are not limited to – religious education and RCIA classes, youth and young adult ministry events, meetings of parish committees, parish fish fries and other fundraisers.**
- External events scheduled to be held in parish facilities (e.g. parish halls, school gymnasiums, etc.) should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Parishes should not commit to additional such events through April 6, 2020, when the situation will be reassessed. **NOTE – On March 12, 2020, Gov. Holcomb announced the immediate cancellation of all non-essential gatherings larger than 250 people, statewide.**

### **Diocesan Offices and Events – through at least April 6, 2020**

- Diocesan offices remain open.
- Effective immediately, all non-essential travel by diocesan staff is cancelled.
- **The St. Maria Goretti Youth Distinction Mass and Honors, scheduled for 1 p.m. CDT on Sunday March 15 at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville, has been cancelled.** The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry will work with parishes to facilitate appropriate ceremonies to present awards to honorees. The Message will publish a story on the honorees in the March 20 issue.
- Meetings of diocesan committees and other groups scheduled for the Catholic Center and/or Sarto Retreat House are cancelled.

## **Additional Background**

In a follow-up to guidelines related to preventing the spread of the flu provided on Jan. 8 to priests and deacons of the diocese, the Office of Worship issued a letters on March 9 and March 13 with the following information:

*In light of the growing concerns due to the spread of the coronavirus to the state, as well as the continued presence of influenza, and following practices recommended by local health officials, here is our updated position as well as some suggestions/best practices:*

### **NEW (March 13 update) – During all Masses:**

- **Refrain from holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer.**
- **All Ministers of Holy Communion should refrain from touching those who approach them in the Communion procession.**
  - Example – laying a hand on a child who is not receiving Communion
- **Given the frequency of direct contact with saliva in the distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue, strongly encourage the faithful to receive Holy Communion reverently in open hands for the time being.**
- **Remove Holy Water from the church door fountains.**
  - Holy water can and should be made available for the faithful to take home for their own use.

### **NEW (March 13 update) – Pastoral Care of the Sick/Homebound**

- It is up to the discretion of each pastor/parish as to how to best minister to those in hospitals, nursing homes, or the homebound in their parish.
- Protocols established by hospitals and nursing homes should be followed.
- While it may be necessary to limit or temporarily suspend routine visits to the homebound or nursing homes, every effort should be made to provide the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick as well as viaticum for those who are in need.

### **Continued (March 9 update):**

- **Holy Communion from the chalice and the Sign of Peace are to be suspended immediately at all public Masses (both Sunday/holy day and weekday/school Masses) until further notice.**
  - While both of these practices are normally encouraged (especially Communion from the chalice) at Mass, the current status of the flu and the coronavirus warrants such an action.

## **Continued Best Practices**

- Respectfully, but repeatedly, remind people (before Mass, in the bulletin, etc.) that if they are feeling ill, they should stay home to avoid spreading the disease (this is good advice year-round).
- Respectfully, but repeatedly, assure the faithful that if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness they are not obliged to attend Mass, and even that out of charity they ought not to attend.
- Priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are urged to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins, or using an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution.
- Churches may want to consider offering hand sanitizer at the entrances to help limit the spread of the virus.
- Limit other opportunities for physical contact before, during and after Mass (example – greeters should not shake hands with people as they enter or leave church).
- Vaccinations, good hygiene, avoiding sick people, and staying home if you are sick are the best ways to avoid transmitting the virus.

The local health department will let us know if further actions need to be taken, and then you will be notified as quickly as possible.

The Catholic Schools Office has shared the following information with students and teachers:

*The Catholic Schools Office reminds teachers and students of the following preventive measures:*

- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.*
- *If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.*
- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.*

*The safety of students, faculty and staff is the Catholic Schools Office's first priority. The office will continue to update schools as necessary.*

In addition to these steps, the diocese – including the Catholic Schools Office – recommends that people across the diocese follow the recommendations of their local health departments regarding additional precautions in their areas. The diocese also recommends following the general guidelines issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The CDC provides the

following on its website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>):

*There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:*

- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.*
- *Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.*
  - *CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.*
  - *Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.*
- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.*
  - *If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.*

*For information about handwashing, see <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>*

*For information specific to healthcare, see <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/index.html>*

The Message will continue to provide updates as necessary. Because our print edition is a weekly, please visit our website and social media accounts for the latest information:

**The Message website:** <https://evdiomessage.org/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/CatholicMessage/>

**Instagram:** @themessageonline

**Twitter:** @messageonline