



## MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 9, 2020  
TO: Parishes and Institutions  
FROM: Laura Bertone on behalf of Archbishop Cordileone  
RE: COVID-19/CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS AT MASS

---

We have heard from many pastors and parishioners with concerns regarding the corona virus/COVID-19 and its possible spread at Masses and other parish events. Given the heightened media coverage, people are legitimately worried that this will become a pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “the immediate risk of being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 for most people is thought to be low. This virus is not currently widespread in the United States. Healthcare workers caring for patients and those with close contacts of persons with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.” The CDC has an excellent website which answers many questions about the corona virus:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

On March 6, 2020, the San Francisco Health Department announced aggressive recommendations to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, particularly through “social distancing” at large gatherings. Neither the San Mateo County Health nor Marin Health and Human Services have issued such a strong statement, but all health agencies are advising caution and good hygiene.

After discussions with medical experts, county health departments, and pastors, Archbishop Cordileone is asking all parishes to take the following precautions at all Masses and gatherings of the faithful in the Archdiocese of San Francisco:

1. Parishioners who are ill should stay home. This is a situation in which one is not at fault for not attending Sunday Mass. On the contrary, it is the responsible thing to do, out of concern for both one’s own health and that of one’s fellow parishioners. This also applies to those whose condition of health makes them especially vulnerable to infection by the COVID-19 virus. Parishioners confined to their homes on Sunday are encouraged to follow the televised Mass, and to make an act of Spiritual Communion.

In addition, there are other ways for homebound parishioners to enter into the spirit of observing the Lord’s Day, such as meditating on the readings for that Sunday, praying the rosary, and (for those who have the availability) praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

(Mass is broadcast each Sunday morning at 6:00AM on KOFY 13 and KTSF 26, at 6:30AM on KTXL 40 Sacramento, as well as on EWTN.) (The Prayer for An Act of Spiritual Communion can be found at

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/devotions/act-of-spiritual-communion-339>. Also, you can find a good article explaining Spiritual Communion and its history here: <https://www.dolr.org/article/those-unable-receive-eucharist-can-have-spiritual-communion>.)

2. Physical contact should be avoided as much as possible: the Sign of Peace should be given by bowing to those around you.

3. Communion to the faithful from the chalice should be suspended.

4. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should cleanse their hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after distributing Communion.

- Before: this should be done in a discreet manner, e.g., in the sacristy during the singing or reciting of the Lamb of God, or at a table placed out of the sanctuary, such as by a side door entrance against the wall at the front of the church. They should finish drying/wringing their hands before entering the sanctuary.
- After: it is highly advisable that ministers cleanse their fingers in an ablution bowl (or other appropriate means in which the water used will be poured into the sacrarium or, lacking that, into the ground in a spot away from where people walk) before cleansing their hands with hand sanitizer.

5. Germs can be spread just as easily by hand-to-hand contact as by hand-to-mouth contact. Communion ministers should try to avoid physical contact with the communicant when distributing Communion. Those who present themselves to receive Communion on the tongue should not be denied their right to receive Communion in this way (Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n. 92).

6. In this regard, this would be an opportune time to review with parishioners the correct way of receiving Holy Communion, both in the hand and on the tongue. (The USCCB article on “Reception of Holy Communion at Mass” has good points on the Communion Procession and Reception of Communion: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/the-reception-of-holy-communion-at-mass.cfm>)

Please continue to pray for all those effected by the virus. The Roman Missal, under Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, has three Masses “For Any Need” (48). These may be used at Masses when permitted by the ordo (cf. GIRM 374).

We also encourage parishes to include prayers for those effected by the virus in the Universal Prayer.

Sample Intercessions:

- Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.
- Jesus Christ, heal those who are sick. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.
- For scientists, health professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good in this difficult and uncertain time, that they will be filled with wisdom and understanding.
- That in times of illness, our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely. Directives will be forthcoming for adaptations that can be made to the celebration of the Triduum, given the virus. We also continue to evaluate upcoming liturgical celebrations and events and will consult with the appropriate county officials regarding any issues with large gatherings. As we have said before, should the status given by the health agencies change to an Alert or a call to cease contact, we will inform the parishes of any necessary additional action.

In uncertain times, people turn to the Church and to those who lead them, and we are grateful for your continuing care and shepherding of the people to whom we minister.