

March 13, 2020

To the Clergy, Religious, and Laity of the Diocese of Alexandria:

Today, Governor John Bel Edwards issued an Executive Order asking people to refrain from attending gatherings of more than 250 people in an effort to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and closing schools for the next 30 days. It is important for us as people of faith and citizens of Louisiana to cooperate with the Governor's order for the health and well-being of our community.

Therefore, I am dispensing the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Alexandria from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday effective immediately through the next 30 days. We are closing our Catholic schools for the next 30 days in cooperation with the executive order. These dates may be updated as needed. I highly encourage those who are elderly, sick, experiencing symptoms of illness, or who are at high risk of illness to not attend Mass these weekends. The virus has been contracted with serious issues by those 60 and older. Those in that age group must take seriously the caution to implement "social distancing".

Please be advised that all previously released guidance for Mass remains in effect with some modification:

- Please empty the Holy Water fonts;
- Please refrain from holding hands during the "Our Father";
- Please extend the sign of peace without physical contact;
- Encourage Eucharistic Ministers to practice good hygiene by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after distributing communion; and
- Holy Communion will not be offered from the chalice to the congregation.

For those parishes with upcoming confirmations, those will go on as scheduled. Please be in touch with me with additional questions about these liturgies.

I ask that parents with children in Catholic schools pay attention to the announcements and instructions of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools and school leaders for the next 30 days. This is a very fluid situation and these guidelines are subject to update as necessary and as directed by state and local officials.

As we face this unprecedented public health challenge, may we call on the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor as we have done over many years to intercede for us. Let us pray,

Lord, we live in fear and uncertainty as we experience the Coronavirus. Be our strength and our hope. Give healing to those affected and protection to all of us. We ask you to calm our fears and trust in You. We also ask the prayers of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, St. Joseph, and Blessed Seelos to strengthen us in this time of need.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

Wishing you God's blessings, I am,

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Aymond", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond
Apostolic Administrator