



## Committee on Divine Worship

3211 FOURTH STREET NE · WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 · 202-541-3060 · FAX 202-541-3088

### MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops  
From: Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, Archbishop of Hartford  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Divine Worship  
Date: February 28, 2020  
Re: Liturgical celebrations and public health concerns

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Your Eminence / Your Excellency:

We all continue to monitor with concern the questions that are arising about the spread of the coronavirus. If and when it becomes necessary to take preventative steps with regard to the celebration of the liturgy in your local church, the following considerations are meant to be helpful, inasmuch as the Diocesan Bishop “must promote, regulate, and be vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese” (GIRM 387). You may recall that this office offered similar advice in 2009 in connection with the pandemic of the influenza virus (H1N1 or “swine flu”).

Fundamentals that always apply:

- urging priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins or even using an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion;
- assuring 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.

Precautionary measures that could be applied:

- suspending the exchange of the sign of peace (or instructing that it be exchanged without physical contact);
- suspending the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful via the chalice.

In the event that the threat becomes dire, as it has in some places internationally, the Diocesan Bishop also has the authority to:

- grant a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass;

- suspend public celebrations of the liturgy, including Mass.

Finally, on a more positive note, among the Masses for Various Needs in the Roman Missal, the three Mass formularies provided under the heading *48. For Any Need* are particularly appropriate in the face of a health threat to the general public. GIRM 374 states: “If any case of a graver need or of pastoral advantage should arise, at the direction of the Diocesan Bishop or with his permission, an appropriate Mass may be celebrated on any day except Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day), Ash Wednesday, and the days of Holy Week.”