



Diocese of Helena

Date: March 11, 2020
Re: Diocesan Epidemic Response

Approved: *+ Austin A. Vetter*

Bishop Vetter and the Chancery Team continue to monitor the situation in Montana with regard to coronavirus. At this time, there are no reported cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Montana. Should this situation change, the Diocese will follow what the State of Montana determines (regarding gatherings of people, for example). The Diocese will notify Parishes by email of any future changes, cancellations, or restrictions. This information will also be available on the Diocesan website and social media accounts.

There is no reason to panic; take the sensible precautions recommended for one who has a cold or the flu. At this time, no Diocesan gatherings (i.e., CYC Convention) have been cancelled.

1. **Preventative Measures — Effective Immediately**

As we have noted before, the most important way to prevent this disease is to maintain proper hygiene practices.

- a. covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow
- b. washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (pray the Lord's prayer for those who are sick) or using hand sanitizer;
- c. keeping hands away from the face, especially the mouth, nose and eyes
- d. and, most importantly, staying home when sick.

2. **Operational Responses**

Should we enter a state of emergency whereby our diocesan entities are impacted by a health risk as determined by local, state or federal governments, the following will serve as the Diocesan response procedure.

a. Parishes – Recommendations

- i. Parish offices should follow the response procedure recommended by the Diocese.
- ii. In the instances where a parish office closure occurs on the basis of disease prevention:
 1. Employees will be paid their normal working rate and hours during the authorized closure.
 2. Custodial staff will be provided all necessary safety wear and cleaning materials to conduct a disinfecting/deep clean of the premises prior to the reopening of the parish.

b. Diocesan Schools – Directives

- i. Operations of diocesan schools will follow the response procedure of their public school counterparts, on a county-by-county basis.
 1. Public school closures for the purpose of disease prevention in a county with a diocesan school will result in that diocesan's school closure.
 2. Follow all recommendations made by your local or the state Health Departments that apply to schools.
- ii. In the instance where a diocesan school closure occurs on the basis of disease prevention:
 1. Employees will be paid their normal working rate and hours during the authorized closure.
 2. Custodial staff will be provided all necessary safety wear and cleaning materials to conduct a disinfecting/deep clean of the premise prior to the reopening of the school.

c. The Chancery – Directives

- i. Regardless of the operational capacity of Diocesan parishes and schools, The Chancery will remain operational. In exceptional situations, a decision to close the Chancery would be made by the Director of Chancery Services, following conversation with Bishop Vetter and the Human Resource Director.
- ii. In the event the Chancery closes for disease prevention, essential personnel will be available onsite or remotely.
 1. Essential Personnel Includes:
 - a. Chancery Services Director
 - b. Human Resource Director
 - c. Financial Services Director
 2. All other salary-exempt personnel will work remotely to the extent possible.
 3. Employee compensation will follow the 'Emergency Closing' policy outlined in the Diocesan Personnel Policy.

3. Liturgical Recommendations

- a. Remind everyone: If one is sick or experiencing symptoms of sickness (including cold or flu) they are not obliged to attend Mass – indeed, out of charity, they should not attend Mass or other parish gatherings.
- b. If there is concern, bless yourself without touching the holy water when entering/leaving the Church.
- c. Each person has the option of not receiving from the Chalice (at this point, the Bishop has not authorized generally withholding the Chalice)
- d. You are encouraged to receive the Body of Christ in the hand, since receiving Communion on the tongue is a direct vehicle for transmitting disease.
- e. It is possible to share the greeting of peace by speaking the words "peace be with you" without touching.

**We will continue to communicate more information as it becomes available.
Please continue to monitor the diocesan web site and social media accounts for updates and helpful informational resources.**