



Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Bishop

March 13, 2020

Dear Priests and Deacons,

In response to events this week regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19), it has become necessary for the Diocese to take additional precautionary measures, which I must ask you to observe carefully.

First and foremost, if you are sick or experiencing symptoms, please do not celebrate the Eucharist, participate in parish activities, or visit the sick in residences, hospitals, or nursing homes. If you are symptomatic of COVID-19, contact your local Department of Health. Officials will give you information regarding potential testing and the need to self-quarantine.

Following discussions with Diocesan leadership and health professionals, I am now mandating that all parishes and institutions within the Diocese of Belleville immediately adhere to the health and safety measures that are attached. It is imperative that you address these points with your parishioners at Masses, in your bulletins, and on your parish websites as soon as possible, but no later than next weekend.

Because this is a rapidly changing situation, all decisions regarding the Liturgy and parish activities will continue to be monitored and further information may be forthcoming.

Please pray for all who have been infected by the coronavirus. Remember that Jesus of Nazareth is our model for ministry in the face of sickness, disease, and distress. He offers consolation, hope, and healing. Thank you for all you do in the name of Jesus Christ in this most stressful time. I am deeply grateful to you for your efforts to make every effort to protect your health and the health of the Christian Faithful. *Oremus pro invicem.*

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Edward K. Braxton'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville



Diocese of Belleville

HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES

- (1) Parishioners should not come to Mass and parish activities if they are feeling sick with symptoms of the virus or if their immune system is compromised. Anyone who is ill is automatically dispensed from the obligation to participate in the Sunday Eucharist.
- (2) Make sure all vessels used at Mass, once purified, are thoroughly washed with soap and hot water after each use.
- (3) The greeting of peace should not be a handshake or a kiss. It should be verbal without physical contact.
- (4) Holding hands, which is not formally a part of the Mass, should be discontinued.
- (5) Parishioners should keep a reasonable distance from the nearest person in church, whenever possible.
- (6) The Faithful should receive Holy Communion only in their hand and not on the tongue.
- (7) Discontinue the distribution of the Blood of Christ to the Faithful from the chalice.
- (8) All holy water fonts and baptistries must be emptied and covered at this time. Holy water should be poured out on the ground.
- (9) Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins and using an alcohol-based antibacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion. This should be done in a reverent and non-distracting manner.
- (10) All parishioners should be mindful of the need to wash their hands with soap regularly throughout the day and make every effort to avoid touching their faces.
- (11) All Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers bringing the Eucharist to the elderly, sick, or homebound, must be in good health, showing no symptoms of the virus. Be aware that many nursing homes in the Diocese not allowing visitors at this time.
- (12) Please consult the regular updates on the coronavirus (COVID-19) as well as all preventative measures which can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). Always follow the advice of medical professionals and experts.



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An Act of Spiritual Communion

It has long been a Catholic understanding that when circumstances prevent one from receiving Holy Communion, it is possible to make an Act of Spiritual Communion which is a source of grace. Spiritual Communion means uniting ourselves in prayer with Christ's sacrifice and worshipping Him in the consecrated bread and wine which are His Body and Blood. Always remember that the consecrated bread is the Body and Blood of Christ and the consecrated wine is the Body and Blood of Christ, even if you receive the Eucharist only under one species.

The most common reason for making an Act of Spiritual Communion is when a person cannot attend Mass. An act of Spiritual Communion increases our desire to receive sacramental Communion and helps us avoid the sins that would make us unable to receive Holy Communion worthily.

A Prayer for Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things and I desire to receive You in my body,
my soul, and my whole being.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,
Come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if you were already there
And unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.