

**A Statement of the Polish National Catholic Church concerning
the current state of affairs and COVID-19
March 16, 2020**

As followers of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are all called to be people of care, compassion and community. This care must be for our own parishioners and also to extend beyond them to the needs of those around us. It is with this in mind that the following statements are made concerning our response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Within our parishes, we must all be careful regarding any gatherings of people, especially where there may be close contact such as parish dinners or social events. In line with the recommendations of the CDC, Parish social events with groups of more than 50 people should be canceled or rescheduled. All events through the end of April fall under such consideration. We should also be reminded though that the parish church is a point of support and connection for our parishioners and for others within our communities. This also may be true for other organizations and groups which use our parish facilities. When events are cancelled, our Parishes should be willing to find ways that they can continue to support and help our parishioners and others who find these events vital. These may include phone ministries or gatherings via social media or video conferences.

Parishes and clergy are also to keep in contact with their state and local authorities regarding any issues or directions on public gatherings. If local authorities make requests for the closing or use of parish property, there must be immediate contact with the Diocesan Bishop. As parishes called to support our communities, we should also be willing to be helpful in offering our facilities where they might be needed in local emergencies.

At the present time, the celebration of Holy Mass will continue in each parish. All parishioners are exempted from their obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. If they are sick, in vulnerable conditions or even if they are concerned about the possibility of contracting the virus parishioners should stay at home. In any of these situations we encourage parishioners to stay at home and join with the congregation through the reading of the Word of God and prayer. Bishop Hodur reminded the faithful that a Sunday should not go by without us being fed by the Word of God. For those who do choose to attend Mass, we remind our parishioners and other worshippers that practices of good basic hygiene should be followed at all times. These include washing hands often, using hand sanitizer when needed, coughing or sneezing into your elbow, refraining from touching your eyes, mouth and face. Out of an abundance of concern, antiseptic wipes may be brought to church to clean the area where you are seated.

In regards to our worship, the congregation is to be instructed not to engage in the shaking of hands or any embrace during the “Sign of Peace” during Mass. Those same actions which might occur after Mass in greeting the clergy or each other are also to be curtailed. If the “Sign of Peace” is offered, it can be with a wave, a smile or nod of the head. Likewise

worshippers are to adopt a ‘social distancing’ measure during worship, not sitting too close to others within the worship space. The recommended distance is to remain 6 feet apart.

Parishes are to remove Holy Water fonts where worshippers would dip their fingers into them before entering the church. Even if they are not removed, parishioners should consider refraining from this practice for a short time.

In regards to the distribution of communion, the clergy will still impart the sacrament of Holy Eucharist by intinction, with the Sacred Host intincted into the Precious Blood and placed on the tongue. The clergy are reminded to continue to carefully wash their hands before the celebration of Mass, and scrupulously avoid touching their face with their hands. With an abundance of caution, the clergy may also wash their hands immediately before the distribution of Holy Communion or use some hand sanitizer or antiseptic wipe. For those who do not wish to receive Holy Communion, pastors can provide the “Act of Spiritual Communion” found within the PNCC Prayer Book. This prayer can be said at any time someone does not present themselves for communion.

All are reminded that if they are feeling sick or under the weather, for whatever reason, or if they fear they might have been contaminated, they should absent themselves from worship and remain at home, where they can unite themselves with the worshipping community in prayer. Congregations should be made aware of these individuals, so that they can be kept in prayer as well as be supported in their time of need through acts of kindness and charity, for example calls or cards and help in providing meals if needed. Those with compromised immunity may also wish to consider remaining home especially if there have been cases of COVID-91 locally. In the case of the pastor or clergy being in this condition, they should immediately contact their Diocesan Bishop so that other plans for parish worship can be made.

Parishes and clergy are reminded to keep in contact with their Diocesan Bishop if there are any questions or concerns regarding these issues or others that may arise because of this COVID-19 outbreak.

As Catholic Christians we are called to be compassionate and caring to all. Please support our parishioners and worshippers in the decisions that they make regarding their own health and show loving kindness in supporting and sustaining those who may be in need. And continue to pray for our Church and for one another that our Lord may see us through difficult and distressing times.

Prayer in Time of National Anxiety

I come to You, Lord, in this time of uncertainty and confusion that has gripped our nation. I pray that our leaders and representatives in government are filled with Your peace, strength and courage. May Your gifts of wisdom and understanding, fortitude and counsel be sought and utilized by them for the well-being of our country. By their belief and trust in You may they provide capable leadership, promote unity and peace, and be attentive to the concerns of our people. May Your Church provide support and comfort and help strengthen our hope for peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.