



13 March 2020

**COVID-19 Coronavirus  
Update 4 for Priests, Parishes & Staff**

Reverend Fathers & Parish Colleagues,

As you know, the situation around the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is rapidly evolving. We continue to be guided by the advice of Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health and local health officials as we discern the best way to protect the health of the faithful, especially the most vulnerable among us, and of all those who serve at our parishes.

This outbreak has caused considerable anxiety among the faithful, but we will continue to base our response on accurate and credible information. Our churches will remain open as usual at this time. It remains vitally important for each individual and the community that we all practise good hygiene to prevent the spread of infection.

All travellers returning from outside of Canada since March 12 – including parishioners, parish staff, and clergy – should self-isolate for 14 days and monitor symptoms.

In addition, Archbishop Smith has asked that we share the following decisions, which take effect immediately:

**Sunday Obligation**

Out of consideration for the well-being of others in the community, Archbishop Smith advises that the elderly, anyone with an underlying health condition, and those who feel even slightly unwell are excused from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass.

**Celebrations of the Mass**

On March 12, the Chief Medical Officer of Health specifically **excluded** places of worship from her recommendation against gatherings of more than 250 people. Therefore, parishes should continue with weekday and Sunday masses for the time being.

**Other Gatherings**

Parish Missions should be cancelled if they were to be led by someone travelling from outside Canada. Parish Missions and non-Mass events such as Penitential Services or Stations of the Cross should be cancelled if you anticipate attendance of more than 250 people.

**Outreach to the Vulnerable**

During this difficult time, when there is understandable anxiety among so many, our parishioners who are sick or shut-in may require some extra attention. The Church has an important role to play through our

outreach ministries. Parishes should explore opportunities to connect with vulnerable parishioners, perhaps through phone calls and/or visits where appropriate. As the Chief Medical Officer of Health shared, "For humans, not just seniors, having company, having people to talk to, social interaction, is a really important part of our health."

### **Pastoral Care Ministry**

To mitigate risk to those who bring communion to the sick, have the Pastor (along with a staff person) respond to the home-bound parishioner. If institutional or home visits cannot take place, reach out by telephone. Be aware that some pastoral care volunteers may be vulnerable themselves due to age or underlying conditions.

### **Continued Vigilance**

Continue the infection control measures previously requested by the Archbishop:

- At the Sign of Peace, refrain from shaking hands – a simple bow, nod, or "Peace be with you" to your neighbour is appropriate.
- All holy water fonts are to remain empty.
- The Precious Blood is not to be distributed from the chalice.

Experts in public health have advised that there is *no* greater risk of infection in receiving the host on the tongue than there is in receiving in the hand. Communicants are free to receive either way. However, for people's greater peace of mind, priests should offer a dedicated line for communicants who prefer to receive on the tongue. In the event that only the priest is distributing Holy Communion and a distinct line is not possible, he may ask that those who wish to receive on the tongue approach after all others have received Holy Communion.

We offer the following reminders to help reduce exposure to any virus and to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or with your elbow.
- If you are feeling ill, stay at home.

We will continue to work with provincial health officials and keep you updated as appropriate. Provincial government updates are posted twice daily at [alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx](http://alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Father Adam Lech at the Chancery Office.

-----

## **Suggested Pulpit/Bulletin Announcement**

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preventive Measures in Place**

The Archdiocese of Edmonton continues to consult health officials to monitor the local situation regarding active cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19). At this time, Archbishop Smith is requesting that all parishes implement the following measures on a temporary basis:

- At the Sign of Peace, refrain from shaking hands – a simple bow, nod, or “Peace be with you” to your neighbour is appropriate.
- All holy water fonts are to remain empty.
- The Precious Blood is not to be distributed from the chalice.
- Non-Eucharistic activities at the parish will be cancelled if we expect more than 250 attendees.

Communicants can receive the Body of Christ either in the hand or on the tongue. We will have a separate line for those who prefer to receive on the tongue. (OR We request that those who prefer to receive on the tongue approach for communion after all others have received.)

Please also continue to practice healthy hygiene – wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitizer regularly, remain home if you are sick, sneeze/cough into your sleeve, and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Let us continue to care for ourselves and one another as we pray for all those affected worldwide by COVID-19.