



Diocese of Scranton Coronavirus Update

March 23, 2020

This document reflects the most recent guidance from the Diocese of Scranton regarding the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and steps our communities can take to help prevent its spread. The Diocese of Scranton will be updating this guidance in accordance with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Pennsylvania Department of Health and local public health officials.

DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

- The Chancery and Diocesan Pastoral Center are currently closed to the public as well as all employees. During this time, the buildings are being professionally cleaned in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- During this time period, Diocesan leadership (including all Secretariat staff) are available by email and phone. In the event of an emergency, Diocesan leadership is still available remotely to assist pastors, parishes and the public with any needs. If you are unsure of which department you need to contact, call (570) 207-2238 and leave a voicemail in the general mailbox. All messages are being received and will be transferred to the appropriate department.
- All other Diocesan staff members transitioned to a remote working environment on Wednesday, March 18, 2020.
- Diocesan staff associated with finance, schools and payroll functions have the ability to remote access into diocesan servers via the VPN (remote access) network. If needed, a schedule can be established to provide necessary access to accommodate all individuals.
- Some employees may be asked to return to their offices as needed to perform a particular task necessary for the continuance of operations – but will be directed to follow new protocols (that will be forthcoming) to prevent introducing the virus into Diocesan buildings that have undergone cleaning.

- Diocesan staff who are working remotely are expected to keep in communication with their respective department head regarding ongoing projects as needed. Some departments may find it easier for a daily conference call between staff members who are working remotely to keep the lines of communication open.
- All Diocesan employees, especially those working remotely, are expected to remain in contact via phone calls and emails on a daily basis. All employees now have the ability to receive office voicemails through their email.

PARISH OFFICES

- Parish offices should remain in operation but are NOT to be open to the public.
- Only essential staff (those involved in payroll, finance or maintenance) should be maintained, **but on a very limited basis**, working remotely whenever possible.
- Access to the parish and clergy should be done via email and telephone. It is vital that clergy check emails and voicemails regularly in order to remain in contact with their parishioners.
- Other parish employees, including but not limited to Directors of Religious Education or Youth Ministers, should be encouraged to work remotely if so needed.
- Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators are expected to adhere to the financial guidance and directives released by the Bishop's Office on Friday, March 20, 2020.
- If your parish has a phone number on an answering service, please monitor it on a regular basis and respond to all calls in a timely manner.
- Pastors/parishes should consider having their office phone numbers forwarded directly to a parish secretary, assistant pastor or pastor in order to help streamline communication efforts.

PARISH MASSES AND PUBLIC GATHERINGS SUSPENDED

Effective on Monday, March 16, 2020, and until further notice, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera announced the suspension of Masses open to the public and all public gatherings in all diocesan parishes, worship sites, college campuses, chapels and health care facilities in the eleven counties of the Diocese of Scranton.

Despite the suspension of all public Masses, churches will, however, remain open daily for individual private prayer. The timeframe for each parish is to be determined by its pastor or parish life coordinator. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass during this time remains in effect.

If an individual is sick, or shows symptoms of the coronavirus or flu-like symptoms, they are being urged to stay home and not visit a church during the opportunity for private prayer in an effort to protect their own well-being and that of others.

Scheduled sacramental celebrations, such as weddings, baptisms and funerals, will be permitted but attendance will be limited to immediate family members and follow any guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation will be available, when requested individually, by the faithful in cases of serious need.

Priests are still directed to celebrate Masses non-publicly on a daily basis for the good of the People of God, the Church and the intentions of the day.

All parish events, including fundraisers, dinners, etc. should be cancelled.

Directives for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter will be forthcoming.

DIRECTIVES FROM THE APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY OF THE HOLY SEE TO BE USED IN THE DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

Please disseminate the following information regarding Perfect Contrition widely.

PERFECT CONTRITION

With the increasing difficulty for individuals to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation due to the current health crisis, the faithful of the Diocese of Scranton are reminded that by having perfect contrition one can receive the forgiveness of sins, apart from going to confession.

Perfect contrition requires the following three things:

- A love of God above all else
- A sincere desire for the forgiveness from sin
- The resolution to go to confession as soon as possible when this health crisis subsides

PLENARY INDULGENCE

His Holiness, Pope Francis, has also granted a **plenary indulgence** under specific conditions.

The faithful who qualify for a plenary indulgence during the coronavirus pandemic:

- Those suffering from the coronavirus illness
- Health care workers, family members, and others caring for those with the coronavirus (exposing themselves to the virus)

The faithful must do at least one of the following:

- Unite yourself spiritually through the media in the celebration of the Holy Mass
- Recite the Rosary
- Pious practice of the Way of the Cross (or other forms of devotion)
- Recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and a Hail Mary

The faithful must be willing to perform all of the following as soon as possible: (considered the three usual conditions for a plenary indulgence)

- Going to Confession
- Receiving Holy Communion
- Praying for the intentions of Pope Francis

CONFESSION: At this time, if an individual contacts a priest to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an appropriate distance (at least six feet) should be maintained between the penitent and confessor. An appropriate location in the Church or sacristy should be chosen (not a rectory or parish office). Care should be taken to disinfect the space following each confession.

PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK: Prompted by many hospitals that have directed the suspension of individuals visiting patients, all Extraordinary Ministers of Communion must refrain from visiting hospitals and nursing homes until further notice. Communal celebrations of the Anointing of Sick are to be suspended. The sacrament should be offered on an individual basis. With any pastoral visits to the homebound, ministers of Communion, both ordinary and extraordinary, should practice meticulous handwashing. If the person being visited is ill with an infectious disease, he or she should be offered a mask. The minister may also wear a mask and if necessary, gloves.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION & CONFIRMATION: It is highly likely that these celebrations will need to be postponed due to the cancellation of public Masses and Religious Education programs to a later date once the current health crisis has subsided.

WEDDINGS, BAPTISMS & FUNERALS: On Sunday, March 16, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control announced a recommendation that public events have no more than 50 people. Due to the rapidly changing nature of this situation, that number could certainly change. We encourage all pastors to make smart and prudent decisions in each individual circumstance and to use common sense and rely on the current guidance of national, state and local leaders. Social distancing and alternative row seating in pews is to be strongly advised.

In celebrating wedding and funeral Masses, all of the directives previously issued for the Celebration of Mass (eliminating the Sign of Peace, no offering the Precious Blood, etc) must be applied.

Communal baptisms are discouraged. Fresh water should be used for each baptism and then discarded. If more than one person is to be baptized, water should be blessed in individual vessels and then poured over the head.

The use of cemetery chapels for final committal services is temporarily discontinued. Committal services should be grave-side only, weather permitting.

CTV: CATHOLIC TELEVISION BROADCASTING DAILY MASSES

Despite the suspension of public Masses, a private Mass will be celebrated daily in the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton, and made available on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton. On weekdays, the Mass will be broadcast at 12:10 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. On weekends, the Saturday Vigil Mass will be broadcast at 4:00 p.m. and rebroadcast on Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m. The Masses will also be streamed on the Diocese of Scranton's website (www.dioceseofscranton.org), made available on the Diocese of Scranton's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and will be accessible on the Diocese of Scranton's YouTube channel.

PARISH LIVE STREAMING MASSES

Over the last weekend, nearly 50 parishes live-streamed one or more of their weekend services on social media. Offering online Masses (whether through your parish website or social media channels) provide opportunities for the faithful to remain connected in some way to the Sacrifice of the Mass during this difficult time. Parishes with the potential to broadcast their own Masses in this way should do so. The schedule of those live-stream or recorded Masses should be announced through email, parish websites or social media.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

At the direction of Governor Tom Wolf, all schools in the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System are currently closed.

While the governor announced an extension of the initial closure period today, we believe it to be in the best interest of the health and safety of our school community to extend the closure for all schools in the Diocese of Scranton until **Tuesday, April 14, 2020**. The situation continues to be fluid and if any changes to that date are needed, that information will be communicated as soon as possible.

At this time, all school buildings are closed to all personnel. Principals and faculty are now working from home, but remain a resource to our students and families and are available through email during this unprecedented time.

The Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System has moved to “distance learning.” All teachers are preparing and delivering instruction to our students through the use of our email system. Administrators have been sending regular communication to parents/students through the use of our email system.

All of our schools have been finding ways to keep our communication lines open and positive school spirit alive during this period of “distance learning.” Schools have been using social media to show students learning in their new, unique environments.

With respect to Easter, teachers will not be sending lessons on Holy Thursday, Good Friday or Easter Monday (April 9, 10, and 13, 2020).

During this period of “distance learning,” custodial staff from each school are thoroughly cleaning our classrooms and common areas (including door handles, desks and cafeterias) with proper sanitary materials to minimize the spread of viruses.

The Diocesan School System is following travel considerations listed in this document and may require students and families who have been exposed to COVID-19 or are returning from countries designated at Risk Level 3 to wait a full 14 days after arriving in the United States and have notice from a healthcare professional that they are free from flu-like symptoms in order to return to school and school functions when classes resume. Additionally, families will be asked to provide an itinerary of any travel and may be asked to wait 14 days until returning to school.

CATHOLIC HUMAN/SOCIAL SERVICES

Due to guidance from state officials, Catholic Human/Social Services has started to offer many of its services by staff via the internet, telephone, telemedicine and FaceTime.

Signs have been posted at all Catholic Human/Social Services buildings that restrict access if clients are presenting any symptoms of the coronavirus or even the flu.

KITCHENS: In compliance with current mandated restrictions and in an effort to continue supporting the food insecurity needs of our brothers and sisters in need, the Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen in Wilkes-Barre and the Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen in Scranton have made the following changes:

- Effective March 17, 2020, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Francis of Assisi will provide only one meal per day. Meals will be distributed outside of the building in take-out containers. Evening meals are suspended until further notice.
- The Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen in Wilkes-Barre will continue to provide meals to the Mother Teresa's Haven homeless shelter.
- Effective March 17, 2020, the Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen Free Clothing Store, located at 39 East Jackson Street, Wilkes-Barre, will be closed until further notice.
- Effective March 17 2020, the Saint Francis Free Clothing Store, located at 504 Penn Avenue, Scranton, will be closed until further notice.
- Effective immediately, the Mid-valley Outreach Program located in Olyphant, Archbald and Carbondale will be suspended until further notice.
- Effective immediately, both Saint Vincent de Paul Kitchen in Wilkes-Barre and Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen in Scranton will not accept donations of food or clothes at the door until further notice.
 - Financial contributions can be made by check or online at:
www.dioceseofscranton.org/css/contribute/ (Saint Vincent de Paul)
 - www.stfranciskitchen.org (Saint Francis of Assisi)

FOOD PANTRIES:

- The Saint Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Wilkes-Barre will remain open, at this time, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Food bags will be distributed at the door. There will be no evening hours.
- The Saint Francis Client-Choice Food Pantry in Scranton will remain open, at this time, during normal operating hours on Tuesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. **(The food pantry will no longer be open on Wednesdays during the response period for COVID-19).** Food bags will be distributed at the door. Any future changes will be posted and recorded on option 6 of the Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen voice-mail system at (570) 342-5556.
- The Nativity Place Food Pantry, 640 Hemlock Street, Scranton, will continue its normal hours of operation.
- The Saint Joseph Pantry, 214 West Walnut Street, Hazleton, will remain, at this time, during normal operating hours. Food bags will be distributed at the door.

SHELTERS:

- Staff have been educated regarding the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if they believe a potential client may be ill.
- All staff have been encouraged to stay home and notify a supervisor when sick.
- All shelters are being cleaned and disinfected according to CDC guidelines and an independent company has been hired to provide industrial cleaning services.
- Any potential client that may have been exposed to COVID-19 or is showing symptoms would be denied entry to a shelter. Staff will encourage those individuals to seek medical advice. If they are unable to do so, staff will be prepared to call an ambulance to assist them.
- Other precautions are being taken to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our clients, including providing maximum spacing between beds and having clients sleep head-to-toe, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Catholic Human/Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton remains strongly committed to providing critical services to our brothers and sisters in need. In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, Catholic Human/Social Services is working to ensure the safety and well-being of both our staff and the members of the community that we serve.

At this time, Catholic Human/Social Services is following all guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control Prevention and other agencies.

Proper cleaning and disinfection procedures are being followed at all kitchens, shelters, pantries and CSS locations under the operation of Catholic Human/Social Services.

At the kitchens, specific procedures are being followed each morning, which include cleaning bathrooms with professional cleaner, wiping down all surfaces with an all-purpose disinfectant, sweeping all floors and using a designated bleach mix and wiping down tables and work surfaces with an all-purpose disinfectant. After lunch and/or dinner service, similar sweeping, mopping and cleaning procedures are also followed in the dining room, kitchen area and dish room.

All volunteers and staff are being reminded of proper precautionary protocols, including urging individuals to stay home and limit their contact with others if they are sick and the importance of proper hand washing, especially when it comes to food preparation.

Catholic Human/Social Services is also following CDC guidelines and recommendations for any staff members or volunteers who have travelled to a Risk Level 3 country.

All ongoing programs and large public events/gatherings have been cancelled or postponed at this time. That includes the annual "Bowl for Kids' Sake" Fundraiser which is held by Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bridge and Host for a Day sponsored by Saint Francis of Assisi Kitchen and the Night at the Races Fundraiser sponsored by CSS Hazleton.

Catholic Human/Social Services also has ongoing communication with its housing and residential facilities in regards to best practices/procedures.

CATHOLIC YOUTH CENTER

Based on Governor Wolf's order for non-essential businesses to close, the Wyoming Valley Catholic Youth Center closed its doors on Monday, March 16, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. It will remain closed until notice is given by state officials that it can reopen.

Staff were notified of the closure and a message was posted on Facebook for parents. CYC staff also worked to notify parents in person and by phone as soon as the decision was made.

During this time of closure, small groups of staff will complete a deep cleaning and disinfection of the building. There will only be a limited number of staff members in the building at any one time.

At the request of Luzerne County, meals will still be provided to participants in the Drop-In program. Meals will be prepared at the CYC which can be picked-up at the CYC on Tuesday or Thursday evenings or can be delivered to a participant's home upon request.

2020 MEN'S CONFERENCE POSTPONED

Organizers of the 2020 *Be A Man Conference*, "Called to Fatherhood," scheduled for April 25, 2020, at Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre, have made the difficult decision to postpone the event due to the coronavirus. Organizers are tentatively moving the date from April 25 to October in the hopes that the virus will be over by fall.

Organizers will be contacting the men that previously registered, sponsors and exhibitors and will give them the opportunity for a refund or to transfer their financial commitment to the fall date.

GENERAL PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

The health and safety of our parishioners, staff, students, families and clients that we serve are of paramount interest to the Diocese of Scranton. While there is much to learn about the coronavirus, based on what is currently known about the virus, spread from person-to-person happens most frequently among close contacts (within about six feet). Current evidence suggests that the coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made of a variety of materials.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus a pandemic, because of its severity and the rapid rates at which it has spread. However, the WHO stressed that deliberate preventative actions can stop the virus from spreading.

We ask that all members of our parishes, schools and human/social service agencies assist with the prevention of spreading viruses by following the following recommendations:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

The Centers for Disease Control continues to update the Risk Level for each country. The Diocese of Scranton will continue to monitor this information and work to prevent this virus from spreading in our community. With that in mind, the Diocese of Scranton may require employees, students and/or families and clients that we serve who have been exposed to COVID-19 or are returning from countries designated as Risk Level 3 to remain home for 14 days upon returning to the United States or after contact with someone known to have or someone who may have been exposed to COVID-19. Those individuals will also be required to provide a notice from a healthcare professional that they are free from flu-like symptoms in order to return to work or school.

As of March 12, 2020, the CDC indicated the following risk levels related to COVID-19:

Level 3: China, Iran, Italy and South Korea

If you have travelled or are planning to travel to countries indicated with Risk Level 3, please contact your supervisor or principal to discuss plans for return to work or school.