



BRIDGEPORT– In a letter to priests issued today (March 18th), Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has updated sacramental guidelines and practices in response to the Coronavirus crisis. He offers further instructions and suggestions regarding the pastoral care of parishioners

during this unique period of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) crisis.

These directives take into consideration the March 16th order of Governor Lamont that in-person gatherings in the State of Connecticut must be less than 50 people, as well as the Bishop's concern for the wellbeing of the clergy and lay faithful of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

Eucharistic Adoration

Although no public Masses are currently being offered in the Diocese, the Bishop said it is important that churches, as much as possible, remain open during some portion of the day so that the lay faithful are given the opportunity to pray before the Blessed Sacrament and spend some time in quiet meditation. Most especially during this unsettling time, the Bishop wants parishioners to remain in close contact with Christ in the Eucharist and with their parish.

He has asked each parish to offer Eucharistic Adoration on the Sundays when Mass is not available. Weekday Eucharistic Adoration is also permitted. Exposition will be simple and not include hymns or Benediction. Each individual Pastor will determine the scheduling and feasibility. The bishop recommends that parishes provide this opportunity for a suitable period of time each Sunday afternoon. Pastors must monitor attendance and make sure that the number of adorers present is less than 50 persons at one time.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Recognizing that a time of crisis can also be a time of personal conversion, it is our obligation to continue to provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation to those who request it. The Bishop has directed that parishes maintain their regular hours for Confession to the extent possible, but communal penance services are not permitted and, if already scheduled, will be cancelled.

An abundance of caution should be used when administering the Sacrament. **Therefore, because they cannot be properly and uniformly disinfected after each individual Confession, the use of confessionals for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not permitted.** Pastors are to designate another open space where Confessions can be heard.

Whatever configuration is used, Pastors should ensure that penitents have the option of confessing anonymously or face-to-face and that a distance of 6 feet (as recommended by the CDC) is maintained between the priest and penitent. One option, for example, is for priests to place themselves with their back toward the entrance door and set up two chairs, one behind them and one in front of them so that both options are available to the penitent. In such circumstances, Pastors should make arrangements to ensure that privacy is maintained.

In order to maintain uniformity and clarity, the Bishop has asked pastors to create signs in the vestibule of the church (or wherever the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be offered) providing the information above and also instructing penitents to wait their turn for Confession in a way that avoids a line and leaves ample space between them and other penitents.

However, under no circumstances may any Confession be heard via telephone, the internet or any social media platforms. Confession of sins must always take place in person.

Because of the large crowds, it has attracted over the past three years, **Reconciliation Monday, scheduled for April 6th from 3:00 PM to 9:00 PM, is cancelled.** Please inform your parishioners of this in a timely manner.

General Absolution

The Bishop has forbidden the use of General Absolution.

Anointing of the Sick

As much as possible, priests are encouraged to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick as needed. When doing so they should observe prudence and common sense. Specifically, Bishop Caggiano has asked that the following directives be followed:

- If a person has been diagnosed with the Coronavirus or if there is reason to believe that a person could have been exposed to it, priests should not put themselves at risk of catching the virus by administering the Sacrament without the proper protective gear.
- Those who have been diagnosed with Coronavirus and who are in hospitals or nursing homes should only be anointed by the trained priest chaplains of each institution, and only if they are permitted to do so by the administration and health care professionals at each hospital or nursing home;
- For the time being, in accord with canon 1000 §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*, whenever priests are ministering to the sick, including providing the Anointing of the Sick, they should use latex gloves or, in the absence of gloves, cotton swabs.,
- Older or vulnerable priests should refrain from providing the Sacrament or visiting the sick or homebound until the crisis is clearly over.

The diocese will continue to work with the chaplains of hospitals and nursing homes to develop more detailed protocols should they be necessary.

Catherine Dennis Keefe Queen of the Clergy Residence

Last week, out of concern for the retired priests who reside at Queen of the Clergy, Bishop Caggiano asked that no outside visitors except for health care personnel be permitted inside the building. Also, for the last several weeks the staff at Queen of the Clergy has been extra diligent in cleaning and disinfecting the Residence regularly and wearing protective masks and gloves when serving the needs of the priests.

Effective today, Bishop Caggiano has asked the residents of Queen of the Clergy for the next three weeks to remain inside as much as possible and to exit the building only for exercise or for essential appointments, such as visits to the doctor, banking or essential shopping. Furthermore, any

residents in the building who must leave and reenter the building regularly for any reason have been asked to temporarily relocate during this period.

Other Information

The Connecticut March for Life, scheduled for Wednesday, April 15th, has been cancelled. The date for the 2021 March will be announced soon.

“Thank you for your continued patience and cooperation during this crisis. We continue to place our trust in Jesus, the Divine Physician, through the loving hands of Our Blessed Mother, and to pray for an end to this illness,” said the Bishop.