



Office of the General Secretary

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3100 • FAX 202-541-3166

Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles
President

Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, S.T.D.
General Secretary

Msgr. Jeffrey D. Burrill, S.T.L.
Theresa Ridderhoff, M.Ed.
Anthony R. Picarello, Esq.
Associate General Secretaries

MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops

From: Reverend Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, General Secretary

Date: February 28, 2020

Subject: Liturgical Celebrations and Public Health Concerns

Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

I take this opportunity to convey to you the enclosed memorandum from Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, Archbishop of Hartford and Chairman of the Committee on Divine Worship, regarding liturgical celebrations amid public health concerns regarding the spread of the coronavirus.

I am pleased to offer one final consideration on this topic: sample petitions, below, which may be included during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

- For those who are suffering in the current outbreak of sickness that they might be healed, and for the happy repose of all who have died from this sickness in recent weeks; let us pray to the Lord
- For scientists, health professionals, public officials, and all who are serving the common good in this difficult and uncertain time, that they will be filled with wisdom and understanding; let us pray to the Lord.
- That in times of illness our merciful and loving Father will strengthen our faith and trust in his goodness and divine providence; let us pray to the Lord.
- That our compassionate Father would touch all affected by the current outbreak with healing and peace; let us pray to the Lord.

Thank you for your kind attention to this memorandum.



Committee on Divine Worship

3211 FOURTH STREET NE · WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 · 202-541-3060 · FAX 202-541-3088

MEMORANDUM

To: All Bishops
From: Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, Archbishop of Hartford
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Divine Worship
Date: February 28, 2020
Re: Liturgical celebrations and public health concerns

Your Eminence / Your Excellency:

We all continue to monitor with concern the questions that are arising about the spread of the coronavirus. If and when it becomes necessary to take preventative steps with regard to the celebration of the liturgy in your local church, the following considerations are meant to be helpful, inasmuch as the Diocesan Bishop “must promote, regulate, and be vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese” (GIRM 387). You may recall that this office offered similar advice in 2009 in connection with the pandemic of the influenza virus (H1N1 or “swine flu”).

Fundamentals that always apply:

- urging priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins or even using an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before and after distributing Holy Communion;
- assuring the faithful that if they are sick or are experiencing symptoms of sickness they are not obliged to attend Mass, and even that out of charity they ought not to attend.

Precautionary measures that could be applied:

- suspending the exchange of the sign of peace (or instructing that it be exchanged without physical contact);
- suspending the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful via the chalice.

In the event that the threat becomes dire, as it has in some places internationally, the Diocesan Bishop also has the authority to:

- grant a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass;

- suspend public celebrations of the liturgy, including Mass.

Finally, on a more positive note, among the Masses for Various Needs in the Roman Missal, the three Mass formularies provided under the heading *48. For Any Need* are particularly appropriate in the face of a health threat to the general public. GIRM 374 states: “If any case of a graver need or of pastoral advantage should arise, at the direction of the Diocesan Bishop or with his permission, an appropriate Mass may be celebrated on any day except Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, days within the Octave of Easter, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day), Ash Wednesday, and the days of Holy Week.”