



## MEMORANDUM

To: Priests of the Archdiocese

From: Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone  
Archbishop of San Francisco

Date: March 13, 2020

Re: Corona Virus Precautions

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Yesterday morning (March 12<sup>th</sup>), the bishops of the California Catholic Conference met by conference call to discern a coordinated effort in response to the coronavirus epidemic that minimizes people's risk of exposure to the virus while at the same time respects their needs for spiritual care and, in particular, for observance of the Lord's Day. Particular consideration was given to Governor Newsom's executive order declaring all non-essential mass gatherings of more than 250 people be cancelled or postponed.

Based on the common principles upon which the California bishops have agreed, I am issuing the following instructions for our parishes and other communities of worship to follow. These are *in addition to* the instructions sent out by the Office of Worship on March 9<sup>th</sup>, which remain in effect as well.

1. There is to be no cancellation of regularly-scheduled Sunday and weekday Masses (the latter very rarely if ever draw more than 250 people). For us as Catholics, Sunday worship is essential. It should be noted, too, that the Health Officer of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Tomás J. Aragón, in his Order No. C19-05 issued on Wednesday, explicitly mentions that places of worship are *not* included among "Mass Gatherings" (n. 8d; cf. the Order here: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/files/OrderProhibitingLargeGatherings-OrderC19-05-03112020.pdf>).
2. Other Masses and religious services that are not essential, or for which it is not essential that they be held at this time, are to be cancelled or postponed. Some services, such as funerals and weddings, may or may not be deemed essential at this time, depending on circumstances. I leave that decision to your discretion. (The three Confirmations scheduled for the month of March have all been postponed to a future date yet to be determined.) Other services are more clearly non-essential (e.g., a communal service to celebrate the Anointing of the Sick). Yet other services can be modified in a way that complies with the Governor's executive order. Such would be the case, for example, with communal penance services typically scheduled at this time. While the communal prayer should be cancelled, it is praiseworthy that parishioners be informed that a number of priests will be available in their parish at a given time to celebrate the sacrament of

Reconciliation (in other words, retain the individual confession and absolution portion of the service, but omit the communal portion).

3. As mentioned in the previous communication of March 9<sup>th</sup>, people who are ill and those whose condition of health makes them especially vulnerable to infection by the COVID-19 virus are already, because of their situation, exempt from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. In addition to this, ***for those who are healthy but feel anxiety from fear of contracting the virus in a large public gathering, I hereby dispense them from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass.*** Those in this situation should observe other means of keeping the Lord's Day holy, as explained in the March 9<sup>th</sup> memorandum. One might also take into consideration the fact that, since the virus has a long incubation period and so it is possible to be infected for many days without knowing, it could be considered an act of charity toward others to refrain from church attendance, especially if one is aware of having been in a situation where exposure to the virus could have easily happened.

4. Priests are encouraged to take steps to avoid prolonging the time of Mass insofar as the liturgical norms allow, in order to minimize the length of time people are potentially exposed to the contagion. Examples of this would include abbreviated homilies, abbreviated Prayers of the Faithful, omitting the procession with the offerings, and minimal music.

5. Priests in good health are encouraged to be even more generous with their time and service in covering Masses, out of consideration for elderly priests and others in compromising health situations who may be especially vulnerable to infection.

6. These instructions remain in effect until further notice. As the situation is fluid, we will continue to monitor it regularly. It is likely that further, updated instructions will be forthcoming in the near future.

Thank you for the pastoral care you are providing for our people during these trying times. Let us remember that it is precisely at times such as this that the Church throughout her history has most brilliantly shone the light of Christ, from the Christians in early Rome who stayed behind in the city during plagues to attend to the sick, to countless saints such as Aloysius Gonzaga who likewise risked (and lost) their lives by attending to the sick during the time of a plague, to heroic witnesses in our recent local history who cared for those who had contracted AIDS when the epidemic first manifested itself and the consequence of exposure to those infected were still unknown. In other words, this is an opportunity that our Lord is giving us to exhibit spiritual excellence through heroic virtue. May our hearts be open to receive this grace.