



**Parish and Liturgical directives from Bishop Persico  
In light of the COVID-19 pandemic  
March 13, 2020**

The following items are to be followed out of an abundance of caution as we strive to protect the health of our people and the wider community. We are implementing these measures primarily to protect those among us who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 – the elderly and those with weakened immune systems.

Please be attentive to the following directives from Bishop Persico:

**MASS**

Bishop Persico (along with all of the other bishops of Pennsylvania) has dispensed from the Sunday obligation those who are present in the territory of the Diocese of Erie.

- *Parishes are to maintain the normal schedule of weekend (and weekday as much as possible) Masses even if few or none of the faithful are present. This is to assure that Mass is available for those who choose to attend. And let us be reminded of the great spiritual benefit of the Mass in this time of crisis extends to all of us – even if few of the faithful are present, and even if the priest finds himself celebrating alone.*
- *We are to remind people that they may participate in Mass if they choose to do so – but are not obligated to do so. If they are sick, or vulnerable to sickness, they should refrain from attending Mass at this time.*
- *As in the previous instruction, the Precious Blood is only to be received by the priests and deacon of the Mass. Priests have a responsibility to safeguard their own health so that they can be available to minister to those in need; therefore, concelebrating priests are to communicate by intinction only until further notice.*

**HOSPITALS, NURSING HOMES, PRISONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

All priests, deacons, and lay ministers are to carefully follow the policies and procedures of public institutions in which we minister.

## FAITH FORMATION CLASSES

In light of the fact that Governor Wolf has ordered all Pennsylvania K-12 schools closed until at least March 29, 2020, all faith formation classes and faith formation-sponsored activities (such as confirmation retreats, living stations, etc.) are to be cancelled or postponed until that time. Please be attentive for updates on this situation from the diocesan faith formation office.

## CONFIRMATION

Local pastors and parish staff have the discretion to go forward with or postpone scheduled confirmation Masses. Bishop Persico will defer to the prudential decision of local leaders. If a confirmation Mass proceeds as scheduled, it is important to assure parents and students to use their good judgment whether to participate or not. If a sponsor is unable to attend, any adult present (such as a parent, catechist, etc.) may stand in as a proxy. An absent sponsor should in no way be an obstacle to a student's confirmation. For those confirmation students who choose not to participate in the scheduled Mass, provision will be made for them to be confirmed at another time.

## PARISH EVENTS

Decisions about whether to hold or cancel parish events (such as fish dinners, confirmation retreats, stations of the cross, etc.) are being left up to the local parish community at this time. Parishioners should always be given the choice not to attend if they so choose. Additional guidance regarding such communal events may be forthcoming from local, state or federal health officials – as well as from diocesan offices. Please stay attentive to updates as this is a rapidly changing situation.

## HOLY WATER

Holy water fonts should be emptied. Even water in large baptismal fonts should be emptied if possible. New water will need to be blessed prior to the Palm Sunday liturgies, and obviously at the Easter Vigil.

## HOLY WEEK

- **PALM SUNDAY:** *No changes are envisioned. It will be necessary, however, to bless a small quantity of water beforehand for use in the blessing of palms.*
- **HOLY THURSDAY:** *As described in the Roman Missal rubrics, the washing of the feet is an optional part of the Mass. Pastors may choose to omit it this year. If the washing of the feet takes place, pastors and assisting deacons are to thoroughly wash and sanitize their hands (in a way visible to the faithful) before proceeding with the rest of the Mass.*
- **GOOD FRIDAY:** *In the Diocese of Erie, the Adoration of the Holy Cross is to follow the option given in #18 of the Roman Missal Good Friday rubrics with one change – namely...the faithful who “approach, moving as if in procession”, are to venerate the Cross from a distance by a simple genuflection or bow. **This year no one is to kiss the Cross. Similarly, no one is to touch the Cross except the priests, deacons, servers or assisting ministers who carry the Cross, and they themselves adore it by genuflection or bow only.***

- **EASTER VIGIL:** *If multiple adults or infants are to be baptized, have sufficient water set aside in a pitcher to baptize all catechumens or infants without dipping into the font a second time. Additional water is not to be taken out of the font after the first person has been baptized. At the Easter Vigil and Sundays during the Easter season, water for the sprinkling of the people is to come from the tap immediately before Mass and be blessed during the Rite of Sprinkling as explained in the Roman Missal. Water from the font, or water blessed at previous Masses, is not to be used for the sprinkling rite.*

## **THE PRIEST HIMSELF**

*As we strive to care for our people in this time of uncertainty, it is of the highest importance that we priests care for ourselves. Priests who themselves are elderly or have compromised immune systems are to take the necessary precautions, for example when visiting the hospital, etc. If a priest himself becomes sick, or needs other assistance during this time, please contact your dean or episcopal vicar, who will seek ways to assist you. During this time of increased health risk, it is important that priests be all the more attentive to our spiritual life (Liturgy of the Hours, Mass, private prayer, etc.) as well as to getting sufficient rest, nutrition, and other healthy practices.*

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is a very fluid and rapidly-changing situation. Please stay attentive to diocesan email, the diocesan website [www.eriescd.org](http://www.eriescd.org) as well as local, state and federal health authorities for updates which may change the directives given above.