



March 3, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you in the midst of a heightened awareness of the dangers not only of the flu but also the coronavirus. As your shepherd, I want to be present to you in your concerns. The situation calls for responsible measures on our part, both to put people at ease in their worship and to help to prevent the spread of these diseases.

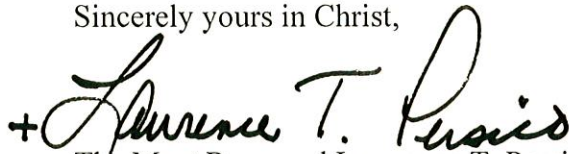
For this reason, I have issued the following directives for all Masses in the Diocese of Erie, which are effective immediately until further notice:

- The exchange of the sign of peace among the faithful is to be omitted.
- At Communion time, the distribution of the Body of Christ will continue as usual. I am encouraging you to receive the sacred host in your hand, but please know that your right to receive on the tongue remains in place and is to be respected.
- I am suspending the distribution of the Precious Blood to everyone other than the priest and deacon.

A few reminders may also be helpful. Please remember that if you are not feeling well, you are dispensed from the obligation to participate in Mass and should stay home until you are well. Also, you should not feel obligated to shake anyone's hand on the way in or out of church, nor should you feel obligated to use the holy water fonts if you prefer not to. Your pastor himself may decide to refrain from shaking hands. We will respect the choices that you make to protect your health.

During these times, we need to rely not only on common sense but also on prayer – prayer for the sick, prayer for researchers, prayer for health workers. Be assured of my own prayers for you as well. May the Lord bless you, and keep you and your loved ones safe.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie