



Dear brothers,

Various counties that make up the Diocese of Cleveland have recently issued Stay at Home Advisories for their respective areas due to the significant increase in reported COVID-19 cases and deaths. This current spike also caused the governor to issue a 10PM to 5AM curfew for the entire state. We currently have 15 priests in the diocese that have been diagnosed with the virus or have been exposed to the virus and are in quarantine. I have also learned today that local hospital beds are filling up with COVID-19 patients. This is a seriously critical time and a time for all of us to cooperate with government, health and diocesan authorities in order to do our part to quell the spread of this disease and reduce the stress on our medical systems. A majority of the health and government authorities have made a point to commend the churches for the protocols that we have in place, recognizing that our efforts have been highly effective. These same officials have encouraged us to continue these protocols for the foreseeable future. With all this in mind, I am asking your cooperation with the following points:

1. Review your specific county and state orders that were issued this week and adhere to these instructions as well as communicate them to your parishioners. Please note that none of them are asking us to close our churches to access for individual prayer or communal worship at this time.
2. Encourage high risk/vulnerable parishioners to stay home and participate in live-streamed Masses from your parish or the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist. Mass from the Cathedral is live-streamed daily Monday through Friday at 12 Noon, and Sunday at 8 a.m. Visit [dioceseofcleveland.org](http://dioceseofcleveland.org) to watch the Mass. If you or your parishioners don't have live-stream capabilities please inform them of the TV Mass that is presented each Sunday at 10 am on WUAB TV – the CW 43.
3. Encourage those who live with, care for, or routinely come into contact with high risk/vulnerable parishioners to stay home as well for the protection of those in their care.
4. Continue the safe distancing practices and cleaning protocols that have been established by the diocese.
5. Face coverings for church attendees are **NOT** optional. Church attendees are required to wear face coverings per section 2 of the Ohio Department of Health's July 23<sup>rd</sup> Order for Facial Coverings, which remains in effect. Please note that the mask order has an exception for an individual who is an officiant of a religious service. You can access a copy of the order online at: <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Directors-Order-Facial-Coverings-throughout-State-Ohio-reader.pdf>. Please post "face masks required to enter" posters at all entrances of the church and parish office. Wearing a face covering and practicing safe distancing is the best way to mitigate the spread of this disease which is transmitted through respiratory droplets.
6. Seriously consider cancelling all social gatherings for the remainder of the year, especially events where larger groups of priests were invited, (ie... Eucharistic Devotion dinners and holiday gatherings). Remember that if a group of priests are exposed to the virus they will all need to quarantine for two weeks. We currently have 15 priests in quarantine some of them have had to cancel their Masses because the lack of available supply help.
7. If you have been exposed to or have contracted the virus please contact your local health department and follow their instructions. Also please call the diocese and inform us either by contacting Fr. Dan Schlegel or Fr. Don Oleksiak.

8. We are currently working with local hospitals to create a team of priests that would have permission to visit and minister to patients with COVID. We are making some headway and will keep you posted if we are able to finalize this effort.
9. Curtail your own personal activities and be certain to take care of yourself.
10. Parishes with day schools should be in contact with the Diocesan Education Office and communicate plans for the remainder of the calendar year.
11. Parish Catechetical Formation programs should consider the option for remote learning/formation for the remainder of the year 2020. Please contact the Catechetical Formation Office for directions and recommendations to continue your faith formation virtually or with at home materials.
12. Please do your part to communicate and educate your parishioners on the personal responsibility we all have to help curb the spread of this virus. This is best done through the wearing of facemasks, observing social distancing, limiting interaction with family and friends living outside your home and not letting your guard down during the holidays.
13. Finally, we recognize the implications the current environment will have for our parish's financial outlook through the end of this year and beyond. Please stay tuned for a letter following the Thanksgiving holiday, which will address this issue in greater depth and offer some thoughts on how we will ensure our parishes, the diocese and Catholic Charities remain strong, stable, and in good health.

I realize the added personal stress and toll this is taking on all of us as this pandemic continues. Please take care of yourself. Please remember the diocese offers free counseling services to all employees and their families through our Health Benefits Office. This is available to you as well. I encourage you to contact Mary Ann Blakeley, Director of Human Resources for further information or Fr. Dan Schlegel.

To close, I offer this reflection for your consideration from the Holy Father's Wednesday audience held earlier this week: "Mary accompanied Jesus' entire life in prayer, right up to His death and resurrection; and in the end, she continued and she accompanied the first steps of the nascent Church... Mary's prayer at her Annunciation, in particular exemplified prayer 'with a heart open to God's will.' Mary was praying when the Archangel Gabriel came to bring his message to her in Nazareth. Her small yet immense 'here I am,' ... was preceded throughout salvation history by many other 'Here I am's', by many trusting obedience's, by many who were open to God's will." The Pope recommended the prayer "Lord, what You want, when You want, and how You want..." "Mary did not autonomously conduct her life: she waits for God to take the reins of her path and guide her where He wants. She is docile, and with her availability she prepares the grand events in which God takes part in the world." Mary rejected fear with a prayerful yes even though she likely sensed that this would bring her tremendously difficult trials. The Holy Father encourages us to pray during moments of trials and restlessness. "Prayer knows how to calm restlessness, knows how to transform it into availability... prayer opens my heart and makes me open to God's will."

I am grateful for your many prayers of support during these difficult times. Thank you for your hard work, courage and faithfulness in being attentive to the needs of your people. Be assured of my continued prayers for you and your health and well-being. We will get through this with the help of God and the support of one another. Happy Thanksgiving!

Your brother in Christ,



Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, J.C.L.  
Bishop of Cleveland