



DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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THE CHANCERY

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MEMO

To: All Clergy/Religious/Parishioners in the Diocese of St. Catharines
From: Bishop Gerard Bergie
Date: March 26, 2020
Re: COVID-19

It becomes clearer every day that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have a profound impact on everyone for an extended time. Each day government places more restrictions on public activity. The number of cases in our country and community is increasing at an escalating rate. As a result, we need to enforce stricter measures to protect the life and health of our priests and people.

For these reasons, effective immediately, **all churches are to be closed to visitors** until further notice. This decision is based on the strong recommendation of healthcare professionals and those involved with infection control.

This will be difficult and disappointing for many in our Catholic community, both clergy and laity. However, the more serious and proactive we are in responding to this pandemic, the sooner we can hope to overcome it, with fewer illnesses and deaths, and fewer long-term spiritual, personal and economic hardships.

I have also decided that our Cathedral will remain open for personal prayer for the time being. In so many ways the Cathedral is a symbol of unity in our diocese because it is the mother church and all members of the diocese are considered her children. During this difficult time, we need to know that 'our mother' is there for us.

The Cathedral will be opened from 11:30 am until 12:30 pm every day. During this hour there will be someone present to monitor and to ask the appropriate screening questions before entering. In the three pews that will be used, there will be special markings indicating physical distancing. The designated pews will be cleaned several times during the hour and visitors will be asked to sanitize their hands when entering and when leaving. The washrooms will not be available. There will be a limit to five persons at a time in the Cathedral and they can not stay longer than 15 minutes at a time. There will be one entrance/exit off the parking lot and the door handles and stairwell railings will also be sanitized.

I am most grateful that many parishes are livestreaming Masses, Holy Hours, and Rosary recitations, and they are reaching greater numbers than ever before. Some priests have used outdoor spaces (parking lots, shrines, etc.) for small, managed, and safe prayer gatherings.

Thank you for your great efforts in responding to the needs of your parish communities. Our continued prayerful support of our people, and of each other will see us through this challenging time.

May God bless you.