



March 16, 2020

My dear People of God,

As the world stands in a time of trial and confusion, it is important that we, as people of faith, remind ourselves that we are never beyond God's reach. Even as we speak of a need to isolate ourselves from public gatherings and even neighbors, we remain assured that God is close at hand.

In Psalm 46 we pray, "Be still and know that I am God, exalted among the nations, exalted over the earth."

With the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and after consultation with other Kentucky bishops and our pastors, I am calling for the suspension of the public celebration of the Holy Eucharist (the Mass) effective immediately and to continue at least through Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020. Before Holy Week we will make a determination regarding future weeks based upon the information that will then be available.

Regarding gatherings other than Mass, I urge pastors to follow the CDC directives that people not participate in gatherings of more than 50 people. We must apply these rigorous safeguards to other parish events, such as fish fries, education/formation events, and parish meetings. I know some parishes have already made plans to convert their fish fries to take-out service only.

The diocese will be distributing materials to assist individuals and families in prayer that can be shared in the home. Likewise we are exploring options for parishes to live-stream the celebration of the Mass. As more questions are answered we will give directives on the appropriateness of having churches open for private prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

I know that our priests, deacons and lay Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Eucharist want to generously make themselves available to bring Holy Communion to people. At the same time we must be cautious that we are not carrying the infection from house to house. Certainly if you or a family member desires the Anointing of the Sick in an extreme situation, every effort will be made to accommodate you in a hospital, nursing home, or in your home.

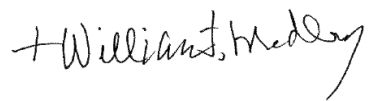
In this time of trial and anxiety, I urge everyone who is able to be particularly mindful of your neighbor, especially the vulnerable who should refrain from leaving home. Can you go to the store for them? Call and check on them, give them human contact if only by phone.

With schools closed and likely daycare centers closing, many parents are finding themselves in a bind regarding childcare. Can you lend a hand and a heart?

While it is a tremendous sacrifice for Catholics not to come to Mass, to the table of the Lord, it is imperative that we embrace this challenge for the common good of all. My prayer is that this unforeseen abstinence from the Eucharist will strengthen our hunger for God.

The Holy Eucharist is at the heart of who we are as Catholics. It is the source and the summit of our lives. I could never have imagined a day where as a bishop and pastor I would ask people not to attend Mass. But this is the sacrifice to which we are called. We are never beyond the reach of God. And that reach can be extended by our acts of charity and concern for our neighbors.

Let us hold one another in prayer and pray especially for the sick, healthcare workers, and caregivers. God bless you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William F. Medley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Most Reverend William F. Medley  
Bishop, Diocese of Owensboro