

My Dear People of the Diocese of Lubbock:

Every day seems to bring us new and perhaps more alarming reports regarding the Covid-19 Virus (aka “Coronavirus”) outbreak and its spread. Opinions regarding impending danger posed by the virus vary widely – no one really knows for sure the reach or impact of the virus.

There is a prevalence of fear, and we must be cautious not to give way to a tendency to panic.

I want you to know that I am closely monitoring the situation, especially the danger posed to our area, the South Plains and West Texas. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is also using its resources to watch the situation and advise bishops throughout the country. The United States is a very large country and—at this time— a unified national response does not seem to be justified or advisable.

As circumstances arise, your pastors and I will continue to make prudent decisions bearing in mind the protection and the health of the people of our geographical area.

At this time, I remind you of several common sense precautions all of us can take, especially those who publicly minister in the name of the Church. The USCCB reminds all Catholics of several fundamental health practices that always apply, but even more in times like these:

- Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist must be sure to practice good hygiene, washing their hands before Mass begins or even using an alcohol based anti-bacterial solution before distributing Holy Communion;
- All of the Catholic Faithful can be assured that if they are sick or experiencing symptoms of sickness, they are not obliged to attend Mass, and even out of charity ought not attend.

Personally, I offer the following precautionary measures:

- Reception of the Eucharistic Species from the chalice is a personal option; we need to be reminded of our individual responsibility in receiving Communion from the cup depending on our own health – those who suspect symptoms of a potentially contagious nature should refrain from receiving from the cup;
- Those who are symptomatic or concerned about contracting a communicable disease should consider non-physical contact, such as a nod of the head and/or a verbal greeting, during the Sign of Peace (and the Lord’s Prayer if that is your local community’s practice) as an individual option – and that choice needs to be respected by others in the congregation.

I am apprising my brother priests—your pastors— of future measures which could be taken in the Diocese of Lubbock should the situation become more threatening. Implementation of such measures would be extreme and unnecessary at the present time. However, it is good to be prepared should further diocesan-wide instruction be necessary.

Please join me praying for the sick and those who care for the sick, explicitly for healing, protection, and prudence.