

NEWS

US bishop continues public Sunday Masses, keeps churches open during coronavirus outbreak

A Michigan Catholic bishop says to keep churches open, turn to St. Joseph in response to the coronavirus.

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By Paul Smeaton

March 16, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) — Bishop Earl Boyea of the Catholic Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, is continuing Sunday Masses, has urged parishes to keep churches open, to bring Holy Communion to those self-isolating, and is encouraging Eucharistic Adoration and devotion to St. Joseph in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

“In order not to stifle people’s understandable desire for greater closeness with Christ at this time of heightened public worry, I would urge parishes to keep churches open for as long as possible each day so that both clergy and lay faithful can spend time with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament,” a statement from Boyea issued last Friday read.

“Similarly, I would urge parishes to be generous with the provision of Eucharistic Adoration.”

Boyea has dispensed the obligation of attending Mass each Sunday, but Sunday Masses have not been canceled, despite an Executive Order from Michigan's governor that public gatherings be limited to a maximum of 250 people. Boyea says the diocese will attempt to comply with the order and has asked parishes to cancel any non-liturgical events that attract more than 250 people.

This bishop said that in suspending the obligation upon Catholics to attend Sunday Mass he was adopting the same social distancing strategy that had proved successful during the Spanish Flu pandemic.

Although the diocese is encouraging faithful to receive Communion in the hand, the diocesan guidelines note that Communion on the tongue remains "a perfectly licit choice on the part of the communicant and should be respected by the minister of Holy Communion."

While many dioceses around the world have instructed the faithful only to receive Communion in the hand, the Catholic Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, headed by Archbishop Alexander Sample, has said that, following consultation with medical specialists, "done properly, the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand pose a more or less equal risk."

Bishop Athanasius Schneider, along with a number of Catholic priests and members of the Catholic laity, have argued, however, that Communion on the hand, in fact, carries a greater risk of passing on viruses than Communion on the tongue.

Boyea also stressed the importance of parishes showing spiritual as well as material solicitude for members of their community who are self-isolating due to the virus.

"Parishes should embrace the corporal work of mercy that is visiting the sick and attempt to ensure that parishioners who are self-isolating do not go without companionship, essential provisions and, most importantly, Holy Communion," he said.

Concluding his statement, Boyea urged Catholics to turn to St. Joseph during this time of crisis.

In 1638, a plague ravaged the city of Lyons in France. It has been documented that many people who were infected became well through the intercession of St. Joseph, while others were preserved from the contagion through his powerful intercession. As we approach the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19, let us earnestly petition the Head of the Holy Family to protect both the Church and the State from this new threat posed by the Coronavirus. Patron of the Universal Church, pray for us.