

March 16, 2020

**To: Pastors, Parish/School Administrators and Leaders of Affiliated Institutions**

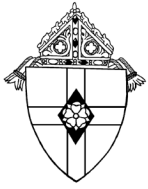
Good Afternoon All:

The acceleration of the news related to the global outbreak of the influenza virus commonly known as coronavirus or COVID-19, has all of us feeling uneasy at best. It is an unsettling time, not just on the health front, but by the ripple effect, it is having on day-to-day living. Sporting and cultural events, schools, churches, and the stock markets have all been affected. The list goes on. On Friday March 13, 2020, the Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz issued Emergency Executive Order 20-01 related to the State of Minnesota's strategy to Protect Minnesotans from COVID-19. The issuance of this Order ensures the State of Minnesota's ability to respond more rapidly to issues related to COVID-19 as they unfold.

**Guidance from the State of Minnesota and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**

After the announcement of the Emergency Order and subsequently on March 15, Governor Walz made several points that are relative to the many parishes, schools and affiliated institutions of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester. Additionally, the CDC has offered additional guidelines. Specifically:

- Until further notice, the CDC is discouraging gatherings of more than 50 people for the next 8 weeks (May 11, 2020).
- **Note:** Bishop Quinn in consultation with the Presbyteral Council will be offering further guidance as it relates to Masses and other sacramental ministry on Tuesday March 17, 2020).
- "Social distancing" (defined as keeping 6 feet away from others at work and in public places) is encouraged.
- Gatherings with participants at high risk for severe disease should be limited to less than 10 people.
- Schools (K-12) are closing from Wednesday, March 18, 2020 or sooner through Friday March 27, 2020, with the plan to re-open on Monday March 30, 2020. (You are encouraged to review the attached March 15, 2020 memorandum from Marsha Stenzel, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the diocese for more details)
- Employers in Minnesota are encouraged to maintain operations with the understanding that workers have the ability to use sick time whenever possible and that they should not be disciplined for missing work during this crisis.



The overall tone of Governor Walz and representatives from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) was to encourage the “status quo” of daily life, but to continue following the CDC’s proper hygiene practices:

- **Wash hands** thoroughly with soap and water and/or use hand sanitizer several times a day
- **Cough/sneeze into your elbow** (if a tissue and/or handkerchief is not readily available), rather than covering your mouth/nose with your hands
- **Sanitize** common work surfaces on a regular basis
- **Stay home** when you are exhibiting signs of a persistent cough, cold, fever, upper respiratory-illness, etc.

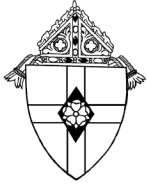
### **Guidance from Bishop Quinn and the Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force**

A pandemic task force meets regularly at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in Winona to continue the assessment of this extraordinarily fluid situation. The consensus of this group was that, while keeping in mind the mandates, recommendations and guidance issued by Governor Walz and the CDC, all parishes and affiliated institutions of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester should continue to have the autonomy to make decisions related to the day-to-day operations of the parish, etc. As mentioned, schools have been mandated to follow the Executive Order of Governor Walz.

The COVID-19 task force strongly recommends Pastors and other leaders of diocesan entities, at a minimum, to abide by the following:

- Develop contingency plans to address possible changes from the current situation (i.e. telling employees to stay home, development of at-home based work solutions, etc.)
- Review policies and procedures related to visitors to facility offices (i.e. vendors, employee family members, etc.), day-to-day sanitation procedures, etc.
- Utilize the CDC’s guidelines regarding large events and mass gatherings when consulting with advisory committee’s about postponements and cancellations
- Determine the necessity of in-person meetings/training. Consider using alternate technological methods of communication.
- Review and determine which travel should be suspended indefinitely.
- Consider making temporary adjustments to sick leave accruals/policies to align with this extraordinary situation.
- Ensure that communications both with internal staff and parishioners is consistent and timely.

In his recent communication to all of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Bishop Quinn urges us all to join in a special day of fasting, abstinence and prayer on **Wednesday March 18, 2020**, and to pray daily for the sick and the dying and for those caring for them (including priests and deacons).



### **Looking Forward**

As you know, this entire situation is changing by the hour. The MN Department of Health (MDH) has published the document “*Strategies to Slow the Spread of COVID-19*” which summarizes the recommendations of MDH for individuals, schools and childcare, workplaces and community and faith-based organizations. We encourage you to review this informative resource. The link is below:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/action.pdf>

Lastly, the diocese is happy to answer questions related to this pandemic. We encourage you to check the Diocese of Winona-Rochester website ([www.dowr.org](http://www.dowr.org)) regularly for updates related to developments that affect parishes, schools, and affiliated institutions, as well as a running list of “Frequently Asked Questions & Answers” that will be published on a regular basis. Please feel free to direct any questions to the following individuals:

- Andy Brannon, Chief Finance and Admin. Officer, [abrannon@dowr.org](mailto:abrannon@dowr.org) or (507) 858-1248
- Philip Briskey, Information Technology Specialist, [pbriskey@dowr.org](mailto:pbriskey@dowr.org) or (507) 858-1252
- David Fricke, Director of Human Resources, [dfricke@dowr.org](mailto:dfricke@dowr.org) or (507) 858-1250

Sincerely,

David W. Fricke | **Director, Office of Human Resources**

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