

## GUIDANCE – 03/25/20 B (adapted for SMO/SMP)

### Pastoral Visits

**At this time**, given the advice of public health officials, the shortage of personal protective equipment, and the need of health care providers for that equipment, visits to those who are known or suspected to be infected with COVID-19 and to those in self-isolation because of a possible exposure **should not be made**. Bishop Zinkula is consulting about whether the circumstances are such in the diocese that in-person ministry could be feasible to those with diagnosed or suspected COVID-19, their families, and those in self-isolation because of exposure, with proper precautions.

When in-person care is not possible, priests and deacons are to make themselves generously available for prayer and support over the phone, by e-mail or text messaging, and across the forms of social media. While the Sacraments may not be celebrated electronically, one can still be present to those seeking pastoral care.

The issue of persons who carry the virus without showing symptoms, or who have mild symptoms, is a challenge to address—especially because any one can fall into this category. **At a later time now unknown**, special will have to be taken in the context of any pastoral visit to the sick and dying, not only to prevent the minister from catching the virus but also to prevent the minister from unknowingly spreading it to others (including other family members who may be present). Here are steps that should be taken when visits are judged permissible:

- Careful washing of the hands on arriving for the visit.
- The individual(s) being visited should also wash their hands / use hand sanitizer.
- Always practice proper cough hygiene; avoid touching the face.
- The visit should last for no more than 10 to 15 minutes, maintaining a 6' distance.
- The priest may approach the person for communion and/or the anointing of the sick. No more than 2 minutes should be spent in the immediate vicinity of the person.
- Touch should be kept to a minimum. Don't touch as communion is given. Do not lay hands physically on the person, but over him or her. Once the priest anoints, he should touch nothing else with that hand until he can wash.<sup>1</sup> That may mean stepping away from the rite for a moment.
- Wipe down the pyx, oil stock, and ritual book with a disinfectant wipe and then wash hands again before leaving, being careful not to touch things on the way out. Instead of using a ritual book, the necessary pages might be duplicated and then disposed of before leaving.
- If possible, do not go directly on another sick call.
- On returning home, use a disinfectant wipe on the car door handle, steering wheel, and other areas that might have been touched.
- If possible, consider changing clothes and laundering the clothes worn to the visit as soon as possible, especially if you can do so before going to visit another sick person. Clothes need to be changed if visibly soiled.

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<sup>1</sup> Just wiping hands would then potentially contaminate the cloth being used. One could use tissue that is then burned. If one is especially concerned, disposable gloves could be worn or an instrument like a cotton-tipped applicator used to anoint, but then there is the problem of proper disposal. They would need to be put in a bag and brought back to the parish for burning.

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### **Holy Week & Triduum**

See the separate document on Holy Week and the Triduum in these rapidly-changing circumstances

### **Church Buildings**

As efforts at social distancing increase, attention needs to be given to potential sources of COVID-19 spread. A number of parishes have generously left their doors open so the faithful can spend time before the reposed Blessed Sacrament and/or in quiet prayer. SMO/SMP have hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and a receptacle are available. Common surfaces are meticulously cleaned and disinfected regularly while the church is open. SMO/SMP have adequate but limited times that the churches are open. If a SMO/SMP should not be able to do this safely, the church buildings will be closed.