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## OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 15, 2020

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we navigate these stormy waters of the COVID-19 crisis, we find ourselves tossed about by fear, anxiety, doubt and confusion. It is not easy to fight an enemy that we cannot see and yet fight it we must since for a few, lives lay in the balance. As Catholics, we prudently rely on the scientific and medical communities to steer us clear of disaster and help us find safe shores. But we also recall that it was the Lord who calmed the storm for the disciples. We must also rely on God's grace since ultimately we walk "...by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor. 5:7) As your bishop, I wish to assure you that I stand with you during this health crisis, praying for you and doing all that I can to protect and comfort you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as those in whose midst we live here in New Mexico. In turn, I am deeply grateful for your support and the assurances I have received these past few days.

As people of faith, we are challenged to respond to what has now been labeled a "pandemic" with a common sense approach recommended by health professionals and yet at the same time trusting in Divine Providence, which, as Shakespeare has Hamlet say, "shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will." When does science end and faith begin? Or, are they both at play at the same time?

Many have thanked me for cancelling church services for a time while others have scolded me for doing so. The reasons are mixed but they all point to a similar conundrum that lies at the intersection of faith and reason. While there is not much I can do to find a vaccine for COVID-19, I do hope by this letter to give a context to the decisions I have made thus far in responding to the current crisis. It is a kind of Lenten longing that we face these days.

Of paramount importance is that the cancellation of church services, including the celebration of the Eucharist, does not mean that we have ceased to provide pastoral care. This epidemic has disturbed all of our lives, so it is even more critical that we care in a special way for the spiritual life granted us by grace. It is my desire and that of all our priests, deacons, religious and lay leaders to continue to care for our Catholic faithful. That care will be immediately expressed in our prayer as well as in ongoing pastoral ministry. As you know from the statement of March 13, 2020, individual confessions will continue to be heard as long as parishioners abide by the core instructions of washing hands before and

after being in church, keeping the proper social distance and not touching the face, etc. Priests will continue to provide the Sacrament of the Sick and the Last Rites, carefully observing the proper protocols and being sure to properly dispose of the oil used. The Archdiocese of Santa Fe and many of its parishes are providing televised, taped and livestreamed Masses so the faithful can pray with the celebrant from home and make a “spiritual Communion.” Funeral services (without Mass) may be held with a very small number of congregants. Prayers are being disseminated through our communications department. And our priests and other church leaders are creatively reaching out to our people in caring and creative ways. We are the People of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, who continue to deepen the bonds that unite us, despite services being cancelled and despite the challenges posed by this pandemic.

In addition, there are some specific points that I would like to pose for your consideration as well, hoping that they will assist you in coming to a deeper understanding of the temporary restrictions in place. We must exercise great caution that amid all the clamor and confusion we attentively hear the Word of God who stills our restless hearts.

**1. Some have objected to the cancellation of Masses and therefore the inability to receive Holy Communion.**

I am deeply grateful for the devotion to the Eucharist expressed by these parishioners. As the Second Vatican Council said in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “... the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.” It is the source and summit of all we are as Catholics. I am therefore most sympathetic with the sentiment expressed by these faithful. At the same time, it is important to remember that these Masses were only cancelled when it was absolutely clear that our people would be put at risk if they gathered for Mass. Viruses are communicated very easily in groups, especially in large numbers. We are keeping our churches open for individual prayer and/or confession but even this is a risk, mitigated, but not eliminated, by the washing of hands and not touching the face. On the spiritual plane, Jesus is present to us in many ways: in prayer, as we read the scriptures, in doing acts of charity, in contemplation, etc. Indeed, Christ is closer to us than we are to ourselves. I understand that it is a great sacrifice not to have the Mass even for a short time but we must not overlook the many ways Christ is present to us.

**2. Some are concerned about the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday.**

Due to the emergency we are experiencing, all Catholics are excused from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass by the law itself. This obligation is suspended in cases of moral or physical impossibility, and may also be dispensed for a just cause when it is for the spiritual good of the faithful. In addition, the Church also has the obligation to protect those who are most vulnerable and those who care for the sick. Therefore, under Canon 87 §1 (cf. canon 1245), I have dispensed Catholics from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for the next two Sundays (March

22, March 29) and will re-evaluate the situation in two weeks' time. While failing to fulfill one's Sunday obligation without proper cause is grave and serious our current epidemic is just reason for my dispensation.

I would strongly recommend that our faithful gather on Sunday to pray over the Gospel of the day, either individually or as a family. As I have mentioned, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, along with many parishes, is making livestreamed Masses available. There will be a Sunday Mass livestreamed from the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis at 10:00 a.m. for the next two Sundays and beyond, if necessary. (This is NOT a scheduled Mass at the cathedral. I will celebrate this Mass privately and it will be livestreamed for the faithful.) In addition, individuals or families can pray the rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours (available online) or use other prayers such as those attached to this letter. I also recommend that we all consider special Lenten practices to accompany our prayer by which we seek God's grace during this difficult time.

**3. Some have expressed the notion that they are not afraid of the corona virus and would rather trust in God and receive Communion.**

Grace builds on nature. Or, as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, "Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it." In the article I have appended to this letter by Bishop Raymond Centène in the Diocese of Vanne in northwest France, the point is made that this thinking tends toward *Fideism*, i.e., the belief that knowledge depends on faith or is somehow secondary to the world as we know it. Instead, grace builds on and perfects nature. We cannot live our lives of faith without grounding them in reality. We cannot help others if we are so sick that we are bed-ridden. Faith compliments reason and we Catholics are called to see how faith calls us to live reasonably, using the creation God has given us as a pathway to our final home in heaven. In other words, it is not reasonable to risk sickness and even death on the premise that faith has called me to do so. Even Our Lord condemns this kind of fideism, this unthinking legalism, when he challenges the Sabbath laws. Reason and common sense are not antithetical to faith. It is also important to remember that it is not just my life at stake here. If I take imprudent risks, I can also infect and jeopardize another person. Even though one longs to receive Holy Communion and has a right to do so, that person must not fail to take into consideration the good of the community.

After all is said and done, we are called to be a people of faith. In this critical time as I struggle to understand our Lord's hand in the drastic measures that must be taken, I am aware that our Eucharistic Fast, this abstinence from the Church's celebration of the Eucharist, is an invitation to our deeper appreciation of the Eucharist itself. I believe that we are being called to reflect on the Stripping of the Altar that happens after the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper. The absence of the Eucharistic celebration all the way to the Easter Vigil is a sober time when we join our Lord in the tomb and no Mass is celebrated throughout the Church. It is a time for each of us to grow in appreciation of the Lord's real presence in the Body of Christ, the Church, if even by its absence we keep vigil at the tomb. This is our Good Friday as we await the Easter promise.

In the attached article from the New York Times, Dr. McCaulley reminds us that in Jesus's final discourse in John's Gospel, the disciples are told that it is better if Jesus is absent for a while so that he can send the Holy Spirit. As Dr. McCauley puts it: "The point is that the loss of his physical presence through his death, resurrection and ascension would lead to an even deeper communion with God. It is possible that, strangely enough, the absence of the church will be a great testimony to the presence of God in our care for our neighbors." As members of the Body of Christ here in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, we are present to one another in our absence, we are united in our social distancing and we care for one another by staying home.

I cannot begin to tell you how grateful I am to our priests, lay leaders, deacons and religious for their service during these difficult times. I am also grateful to my colleagues at the Catholic Center and to the other religious communities that grace our archdiocese. The Catholic Church is no stranger to epidemics and plagues. Throughout our history we have endured calamities galore and have passed through them with God's grace and the good will and pastoral outreach of so many dedicated men and women. This time is no different. Let us continue to pray for one another, asking God to deliver us from the scourge of illness and to especially help those who have been affected and all those on the medical front lines. Please refer to our website for prayers that you can download and pray during the current crisis. You can also contact Ms. Celine Radigan at 505-831-8231 if you have any questions, comments or concerns. I have appended some articles that you may find helpful as well.

I pray that the Lord of Life and All Healing will raise his arms of benediction over us and the whole world in our time of need. And may Nuestra Senora de la Paz, who has been with us in this sacred place since 1598, intercede for us, her children, as we seek her help and guidance. May God bless you and may Mary, Health of Christians, pray for us.

Your Servant in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ John C. Wester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend John C. Wester  
Archbishop of Santa Fe



# The Christian Response to the Coronavirus: Stay Home

When loving your neighbor means keeping your distance.

**By Esau McCaulley**

Dr. McCaulley is an assistant professor at Wheaton College.

March 14, 2020

The church, the actual building that houses black bodies and souls, stands at the center of black life and culture. It is a fact hiding in plain sight that one of the first cooperative economic ventures former slaves undertook was the purchase and maintenance of churches. Without the cooperation of the church, many black colleges, universities and political organizations would not exist. To this day, American black Christians attend church at a higher rate than any other ethnic group.

It is not then surprising that when terrorists wanted to strike fear in the hearts of black believers, they burn and attack our churches. Despite the trauma, the church has remained a source of hope. The marches and sit-ins of the civil rights movement were often preceded by mass worship services.

But what happens when the church is a part of the danger?

With the novel coronavirus spreading rapidly, this is not simply a question for individual church members. The pandemic forces the church as an institution to consider its role during a time of crisis. Many religious communities are suspending their typical operations. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has stopped services worldwide. The Catholic Church in Rome shuttered its doors temporarily. Much of Washington State has done the same. What should we think about this? Are Christians abandoning their responsibility to the sick and suffering?

Some Christians may be tempted to look back on their history of remaining physically present during times of distress. Starting around 250 A.D., A.D., a plague that at its height was said to kill 5,000 people a day ravaged the Roman empire. The Christians stood out in their service to the infirm. Because they believed that God was sovereign over death, they were willing to minister to the sick even at the cost of their lives. This witness won many to the Christian cause. Should we follow their example and gather to celebrate in word and ritual, in the sermon as well as the bread and the wine?

Doctors and nurses of faith can indeed draw upon this story today to inspire them to tend to those sickened by the pandemic. What about the rest of us? This remains certain in the ever-shifting narrative of Covid-19: the most effective ways of stopping the spread of the virus is by social distancing (avoiding large gatherings) and good personal hygiene (washing our hands). The data suggests that what the world needs now is not our physical presence, but our absence.

This does not seem like the stuff of legend. What did the church do in the year of our Lord 2020 when sickness swept our land? We met in smaller groups, washed our hands and prayed. Unglamorous as this is, it may be the shape of faithfulness in our time.

There is a lesson here for a diminished church. It is not that the church should go away forever, but that heroic virtue comes in small actions as much as in large ones. We live in an age of self-assertion, where everyone is yelling, "Pay attention to me because I am the only one who can help." But part of the Christian message is that God comes

to us in ways that defy our expectations. The all-powerful empties himself of power to become a child. Jesus as king does not conquer his enemies through violence, he converts them to his cause by meeting violence with sacrificial love.

The church's absence, its literal emptying, can function as a symbol of its trust in God's ability to meet us regardless of the location. The church remains the church whether gathered or scattered. It might also indirectly remind us of the gift of gathering that we too often take for granted.

Recently, I came home from a trip out of state and my son ran to the door to greet me shouting, "Daddy, daddy!" He jumped into my arms and gave me a hug with all the strength his 5-year-old body could muster. The absence had made the return home that much sweeter. It reminded me that my life was not out there speaking to crowds and trying to impress strangers. My life was at home among friends and family. I do not know when I will be able to take the bread and wine without hesitancy with the members of my church, but when I do I hope that I match my son's joy.

My daughter came to my office nearly in tears today because the piano concert that she had been preparing for the entire year had been canceled. To comfort her, I told her that her small sacrifice and many others like it might save the lives of people she will never meet. Through our diligence we could provide elderly couples with more years to enjoy together. It could mean more Christmases and Thanksgivings in which children get to know their grandparents and hear stories of what their parents were like when they were young. Our adjustments now will allow younger people with chronic illness a chance for a full life. If we believe that all life is sacred, from conception to death, the entirety of our lives — even the last years — is of tremendous value.

Regardless of our beliefs, the one experience common to all humanity is that we die. In that we share a kinship. But Christians can, through their actions and faith, lodge their protest against this great enemy, not as a shaking of one's fist at the wind, but as testimony to the greater hope of the eventual defeat of death itself. The thing we must always struggle to discern is the proper shape of that testimony.

When I was younger, I had an aunt stay with us for a few days who was afflicted with H.I.V. I was only a child and the information was hazy and jumbled in my developing mind. I do remember vividly sitting at our dinner table eating fries with a little too much ketchup. She came and sat next to me and asked if she could have some. I was afraid. What if she had a cut on her lip and bled into the fries and I wouldn't be able to tell? Could it be spread through saliva? I was terrified, but I loved my aunt more than I feared her disease. So we ate fries together and I swallowed my terror. That hasty communion is my lasting memory of her.

During the AIDS epidemic, many churches showed their solidarity by sharing the bread and the wine with the infected to show that there was nothing to fear. Today, it may be that we show our solidarity by not sharing.

The Gospel of John recounts Jesus' words to his disciples in the upper room before his death. During this final discourse, he tells them that it is better that he goes away so that the comforter (the Holy Spirit) would come. The point is that the loss of his physical presence through his death, resurrection and ascension would lead to an even deeper communion with God. It is possible that, strangely enough, the absence of the church will be a great testimony to the presence of God in our care for our neighbors.

Esau McCaulley (@esaumccaulley) is an assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and a priest in the Anglican Church in North America, where he serves as the director of the Next Generation Leadership Initiative.

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# **Coronavirus and the Church: 'Submission' or 'lack of faith'?**

Héloïse de Neuville

France

## **A French bishop calls on Catholics not to pit civil law against divine law, says being careless in dealing with COVID-19 is tantamount to 'tempting God'**

Bishop Raymond Centène has scolded Catholics who are questioning the validity of his recent decision to ban all public Masses in the Diocese of Vannes in northwest France in an effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The 62-year-bishop, who has led the diocese in Brittany the past fourteen years, took issue with those who are creating an artificial confrontation between the Church's commandments and the civil laws.

"Obedience to civil laws that is not a concession made out of weakness; it is a Christian's duty," Bishop Centène said.

The Diocese of Vannes is located in the department of Morbihan, one of the three French territories hardest hit by COVID-19.

## **'Viruses are not destroyed when we enter a church'**

The bishop said obeying civil authorities is in no way opposed to St Peter's declaration before the Sanhedrin that "obedience to God comes before obedience to humans" (Acts 5, 29).

"It is necessary to distinguish between conscientious objection that could compromise God's plan" and obedience to "laws aimed at safeguarding public health," he said.

Bishop Centène also warned Catholics not to make dubious analogies, such as evoking the resistance of the martyrs in times of trial.

"Their witness was at the cost of their own lives and not at the risk of the health and life of their neighbor," he pointed out.

He urged believers to follow the advice of St. Ignatius of Loyola: "Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God."

## **The temptation of 'fideism'**

The bishop said the virtues of "charity" and "prudence" must guide our actions and decisions during the coronavirus pandemic, especially on the question of offering Mass and access to the Eucharist.

He said the Blessed Sacrament is never "a right" that a person of faith can claim "in defiance of charity."

"We cannot ask God to perform a one-off miracle to make up for our lack of prudence," Bishop Centène said.

"Viruses are no more destroyed by going into a Catholic church than they are by going into a Protestant one," he said, rejecting such an attitude as a form of providentialism.

The bishop also pointed out that the consecrated host "remains subject to the laws of nature" and can be contaminated with the virus.

He said he was most concerned about the lack of prudence some Catholics are demonstrating during the pandemic. He likened it to "tempting God."

As an example he cited the Gospel passage from the First Sunday of Lent, which recounts the temptations Jesus faced in the desert.

The devil tells Jesus to throw himself down from the top of the temple and that God will send his angels "lest you dash your foot against a stone". Jesus replies: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

"Praying for health without taking any precautions to prevent the spread of a disease is not faith, it is fideism," the bishop said.

Addressing those Catholics who are worried about not being able to go to Mass, he noted that the Sunday obligation is a matter of Church law.

He said Church authorities can temporarily dispense with this obligation in times of difficulty or when it is impossible for the faithful to attend Mass.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/coronavirus-and-the-church-submission-or-lack-of-faith/11988>

FAITH SHORT TAKE

# I am a scientist working to stop coronavirus. We should cancel all Masses.

Patrick O'Neill

March 13, 2020

As is already clear from the sudden rash of closings, cancellations and diagnoses of prominent people, the coronavirus outbreak is spreading rapidly throughout the United States. In response, many bishops have taken the difficult but prudent step of dispensing the faithful from their Sunday Mass obligation. Those decisions are to be commended for the sake of public safety. Other bishops, however, have gone further. Some dioceses (including Seattle, Chicago, Newark and others) have suspended the public celebration of Masses altogether. If bishops wish to do their utmost to contain the spread of the outbreak, it is my sorrowful conclusion that they must all take this extraordinary step and suspend Masses throughout the United States until the outbreak has been stabilized.

*If bishops wish to do their utmost to contain the spread of the outbreak, it is my sorrowful conclusion that they must all take this extraordinary step and suspend Masses.*

Please let me be clear: I am not a theologian and do not pretend to possess the competence to make theological claims. I am only a computational biologist alarmed by the spread of the coronavirus. One week ago I took a leave of absence from my work to volunteer with the New England Complex Systems Institute, which has rapidly assembled a global network of volunteers in science, technology and policy in order to help contain the outbreak. I am also a catechumen. But even as



one only a few steps down the lifelong path of conversion, I am deeply concerned for the well-being of the Catholic faithful and am cognizant of the church's great potential influence to combat the spread of the infection. It is my lay understanding that the suspension of public Masses is a measure that bishops may take in the gravest of circumstances. I simply wish to explain the gravity of the present situation from a scientific point of view and explain how the continued celebration of public Masses makes them even graver.

In recent days, people with ordinary levels of scientific literacy may have heard uncertain and conflicting reports about the scope and gravity of the outbreak. As a scientist who has been involved in conversations among experts on this issue, I therefore wish to first summarize the best understanding of the epidemiological community.

### **What we know about the virus and outbreak**

Covid-19 is the disease caused by SARS-nCoV-2, a novel coronavirus that emerged from Hubei, China, late last year and spread throughout the globe. As of this writing, there have been over 135,000 confirmed cases worldwide and over 5,000 deaths. In the United States, the numbers stand at almost 1,700 confirmed cases and at least 41 deaths. The true number of Covid-19 infections is unknown, due to the difficulties and limited availability of clinical testing. Several different estimates by different methods all suggest that the true case load is underestimated by a factor of 10 or 100. The true number of infections in the United States is therefore now between 17,000 and 170,000.

### ***[Explore all of America's in-depth coverage of the coronavirus pandemic]***

Covid-19 is not properly comparable to the flu, as is sometimes suggested. Hospitalization is required in 10 to 20 percent of cases. According to my best estimate (based on current data, calculating deaths as a percentage of confirmed cases), the mortality rate is 3.7 percent (almost 40 times that of the flu), and may rise to as much as 10 percent if hospital treatment is unavailable. Covid-19 is

spreading rapidly in the United States, with the number of confirmed infections doubling approximately every three days. The U.S. has approximately one million hospital beds, of which perhaps 450,000 are free at any given time, and not all of those are equipped to treat the acute respiratory distress that Covid-19 can cause. At current rates, we will reach hospital capacity in less than three weeks. Due to the rapid doubling time, every day of inaction at this stage of the outbreak could increase the total toll of the outbreak by roughly 25 percent.

The Covid-19 outbreak can be slowed and stabilized, as China's example shows. But we must also enact immediate and stringent measures as China did. Halting the outbreak in Wuhan required radical interventions: quarantining cities, disrupting daily life and restricting the movement of almost 800 million people. These measures were indeed draconian. However, because Covid-19 can only be combated by reducing opportunities for transmission, they were also necessary to avoid complete infection of the entire country.

### **How suspending public Masses can help contain the outbreak**

Recently, the bishops of many U.S. dioceses have dispensed the obligation to assist at Mass. This is an excellent first step and they are to be commended for recognizing the severity of the situation. Other bishops have gone further, suspending the public celebration of Mass entirely. While a dispensation from the Sunday obligation, leaving the faithful free to decide whether to go to Mass, benefits Catholics who are anxious about exposure to Covid-19, it does not go far enough from an epidemiological perspective.

*Given what we know about this outbreak, any large gathering of even apparently healthy people still constitutes a grave public health risk.*

Given what we know about this outbreak, any large gathering of even apparently healthy people still constitutes a grave public health risk. Already we are approaching the point where there is a non-negligible probability (about 7 percent, according to my estimates, and rapidly rising) that any gathering of 100 people will

involve at least one person infected with Covid-19. Therefore, I argue, it is not enough that attendance at large public gatherings be made morally optional; there is a moral duty to avoid even holding large public gatherings whenever possible.

There are several reasons for this admittedly severe position. First, newly infected patients may take one to two weeks to develop symptoms, and many cases remain completely asymptomatic throughout. Such patients are still infectious for much of this time and may therefore transmit their infections unknowingly. Second, it must be said that a policy of voluntary self-quarantine for those with infections is only partially reliable, as we have already seen examples of patients knowingly violating self-quarantine for far more trivial reasons than to go to Mass. Patients in such a situation may be unaware of the full implications of their decision, but this does not mitigate the risk of their choices. Lastly, even if Catholics wish to endure extreme *personal* risks to attend Mass (a position with which I am sympathetic), they cannot physically do so without also imposing grave *social* risks on the public. In a statistical sense, the position of an asymptotically infected Catholic attending Mass today is analogous to someone driving to Mass by a route that will unknowingly take them through a crowded sidewalk, unintentionally but unavoidably imperiling the lives of passersby.

The Covid-19 outbreak will be a profound challenge for the church, and it must be fought along every front of an extremely complex battle. This challenge will require the deepest outpourings of faith, hope and love, and the most rigorous exercises of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. In my scientific opinion, I regret to say, there is no prudent way for a Catholic in the United States to attend any large public gathering without aggravating the spread of the outbreak risking the lives of others. Suspension of public Masses is an extraordinary measure, but one that some U.S. bishops, as well as bishops in other affected countries including Italy, have already taken, and the entire U.S. church must follow suit. The church must

respond with every ounce of intelligence, creativity, flexibility and compassion at its disposal in order to continue to feed the spiritual hunger of mankind without putting lives at risk.

*Correction, March 14, 2020: Due to an editing error, the diocese of Providence and all dioceses in Pennsylvania were incorrectly described as having suspended the public celebration of Mass. Providence and the Pennsylvania dioceses have dispensed the faithful from their Sunday obligation, but at this time are not among the dioceses that have suspended the public celebration of Mass.*

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**SHOW COMMENTS (25)**

## *Stirring Sermons About Coronavirus, in Empty Cathedrals*

With large gatherings banned, ministers offered messages of calm and compassion on Sunday as parishioners watched on live stream.



By **Liam Stack**

March 15, 2020 Updated 3:37 p.m. ET

At 11:15 on Sunday morning, the Rev. Kristin Kaulbach Miles, a priest at Trinity Church Wall Street, stepped into the sanctuary of the soaring 1846 Gothic Revival building in Manhattan and delivered a sermon about the need to come together in the face of coronavirus.

But no parishioners were there.

The scene was repeated at some of the most well-known houses of worship in New York: St. Patrick's Cathedral, the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York; Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church; and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, seat of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Something similar had already played out in the city's mosques during Friday prayers and in synagogues at Shabbat services on Saturday.

The coronavirus outbreak forced the cancellation of religious services across New York and much of the country this weekend, but faith leaders have stepped onto the breach in an effort to comfort and lead communities that are increasingly anxious and unsure about where to turn.

On Sunday, ministers preached messages of calm and compassion to empty churches as their congregants watched on live stream, isolated at home by public health warnings that convinced the Catholic Church and several major Protestant denominations to shut their doors.

At Trinity Church, Ms. Miles told the story of Jesus asking a Samaritan woman for water "in a way that follows the Covid-19 safety protocols." Looking across the empty pews, she urged the worshipers at home to be there for each other.





Dr. Julian Wachner, director of music and arts at Trinity, plays piano during Sunday services. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times

“Every hand we don’t shake must become a phone call we make,” she said from the pulpit. “Every inch and every foot of distance we put between ourselves and another must become a thought about how we could help that other should the need arise.”

Get an informed guide to the global outbreak with our daily **coronavirus** newsletter.



Dane Miller, a sacristan, then offered prayers for the sick as well as for President Trump, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio. He also asked God to grant the faithful good judgment in a time of crisis.

“May we each be guided to the right decisions for the good of all,” he said.

The only people seated in the pews were other parish priests, who clapped for each other when the Mass was done.

There have been more than 600 confirmed cases of coronavirus in New York and two deaths, officials said, sending a wave of fear across the region that has upended daily life.

“The government is utterly failing to provide rational, reliable leadership,” said Jeffrey Cahn, executive director of Romemu, a popular Upper West Side synagogue that he said was the first in New York to cancel in-person Shabbat services.

“As religious leaders we have a pulpit,” Mr. Cahn said. “If we can tell 4,000 people, ‘Even though everybody says do X, we are telling you to do Y and do it now,’ then we should do that.”





Trinity live casts its services each week, but normally with members in the pews. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times

Mr. Cahn said his synagogue was now advising congregants not to gather in groups in their homes, even to watch Shabbat services online.

On Friday night, Rabbi David Ingber used the live stream service to offer comfort to worshipers.

“One of the beautiful things now is every place can be a synagogue,” the rabbi said. Despite their dislocation, he told the worshipers that the past week should make them “acutely aware of how interwoven we all are.”

“Even though we are not physically close, we are all connected,” he said.

Others have urged their followers to care for those whose lives have been affected by the outbreak.

“Let us pray for all who are sick, as well as doctors, nurses, caregivers and all those working hard to combat the disease,” Cardinal Timothy Dolan said in a statement on Saturday.

Father James Martin, a Jesuit priest and writer who said he had been in voluntary isolation since returning from a pilgrimage to Israel, gave spiritual advice to his 600,000 Facebook followers on Saturday.

Citing the teaching of Jesus and the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, he urged his viewers to “resist panic” and not to “demonize or scapegoat” Asian people for a pathogen first detected in Wuhan, China.

“This virus is no one’s fault,” Father Martin said in a video. “We still have the fundamental Christian responsibility to love people and not treat them like dirt. Lots of things have been canceled by the coronavirus, but love is not one of them.”

Some religious leaders have also sought to comfort the members of their own clergy.

In a letter last Wednesday, the Rt. Rev. Andrew Dietsche, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, told priests and deacons that they “do not have the freedom to indulge in ourselves the common fears of the masses.”

“We are called to a witness of strength, courage and faith and to be a calm, non-anxious presence in times of fear,” he wrote. He added that “maintaining a normalcy about the common life of our church” could “go a long way to reassuring our people and helping them, in the midst of uncertainty, to live in trust, confidence and hope.”

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#### The Coronavirus Outbreak

### Answers to your most common questions:

Updated March 14, 2020

- **What is a coronavirus?**

It is a novel virus named for the crownlike spikes that protrude from its surface. The coronavirus can infect both animals and people and can cause a [range of respiratory illnesses](#) from the common cold to lung lesions and pneumonia.

- **How contagious is the virus?**

It seems to [spread very easily](#) from person to person, especially in homes, hospitals and other confined spaces. The pathogen can travel through the air, enveloped in tiny respiratory droplets that are produced when a sick person breathes, talks, coughs or sneezes.

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