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March 12, 2020

Priests, Deacons, and the Faithful concerning the Corona virus and Pastoral Care in the Diocese of Peoria

In consultation with Catholic Healthcare in Central Illinois and on the strong urging of several Public Health Boards from our area, I have decided to suspend for the time being the obligation to participate at Sunday Mass. I strongly urge those over 60 years old not to come to Mass or other religious services, as seniors are particularly vulnerable to catching the corona virus. As before, I ask anyone with communicable diseases to stay at home.

Upon consultation with our Schools office, I have suspended all our educational programs for the next week in order to allow for an intense program of cleaning and disinfecting in all our buildings. This will also allow our principals and faculty to prepare e-learning (online teaching days). If the health crisis continues, we will most likely suspend classes for the foreseeable future. I also ask parishes to cancel religious education programs, prayer groups, parish events and other gatherings at this time.

I am also canceling Cathedral and Regional Confirmations and by virtue of this letter, I grant the faculty to Confirm to all the priests of our Diocese. I strongly recommend that this Sacrament be given to small groups without the attendance of people from out of town and where a proxy may serve as the sponsor of record.

Please remember as I indicated in my last letter, we should not shake hands or hug at the Kiss of Peace, and instead use a wave or friendly smile. I also urge people not to hold hands during the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Once again, I highly recommend that people receive the Blessed Sacrament in the hand and not in the tongue. I ask as well that our holy water fonts be emptied and disinfected.

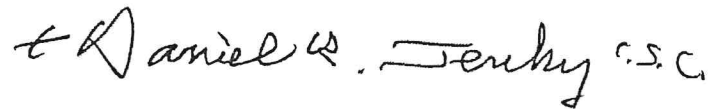
We have posted on the Diocesan website the schedule for Masses on EWTN and on the internet. We have also posted available prayers to help the faithful make a Spiritual Communion at home.

I fully realize that this moment of great concern could pass rather quickly, but I also do not think we can take any risk at this time, of endangering lives. I believe it is more prudent to be "proactive" rather than "reactive" in the face of serious danger. Please know that all our colleges and universities in Central Illinois have already closed. Many businesses are also limiting meetings and face-to-face gatherings.

Speaking as your Bishop, I urge you not to panic but instead to take prudent steps. I strongly urge you to read the Holy Bible and to pray the Rosary. Remember that our God is a Mighty God and our security is always ultimately in His hands.

May Almighty God bless and protect you, and may Our Lady Help of the Sick pray with us and for us at this time of need.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky C.S.C.". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA