

## DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER MEMORANDUM

To: Pastors with Cemeteries, Directors of Cemeteries, and Business Managers of Cemeteries  
From: David Gabert, Director of Cemetery Operations  
Date: April 14, 2020  
RE: Update 4 - Cemetery Operations, the Coronavirus Pandemic, and Protective Measures

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I do hope you are well and staying safe. While this memo is meant to provide protective measures for cemetery workers/staff, we strongly recommend that the clergy ministering to the sick and at funerals also adhere to the steps outlined below.

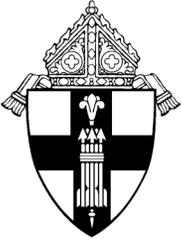
Under the Governor's emergency order, essential employees include "***workers performing mortuary services and workers at funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemeteries.***" Essential employees and organizations are to continue to operate "with necessary staff to complete critical and essential functions."

As Catholics we believe that taking care of the remains of our deceased brothers and sisters and comforting the bereaved is an essential and sacred ministry. With this in mind, I ask that you make every effort to keep our Catholic cemeteries operational and to work with the state and cities/towns when needed. Unfortunately, they do expect the death rate to increase in the upcoming weeks. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you plan for increased burials at your cemetery. ***In addition, I ask the cemeteries that are closed for the winter/late spring to consider opening as early as possible.*** If your cemetery employees or independent contractors are unable to perform burials for any reason, please call me directly at (603) 529-0481 or (603) 486-3038.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), "There is currently no known risk associated with being in the same room with the body of someone who died of COVID-19." The virus is primarily spread via close contact (within 6 feet) with an infected person via cough or sneeze landing in the nose or mouth of nearby person or inhaled into lungs. It may linger in the air between living people longer than initially thought. It is also possible to contract COVID-19 via a surface or object with the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly eyes.

**Committals and Burials:** While burials must and will continue during this crisis, we must always be concerned for the health and welfare of our staff and others. ***Therefore, we strongly recommend having direct interments and to have the committal services at a later date.*** Please consider the following protective measures for cemetery workers:

1. Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), which includes disposable gloves and face coverings (that cover nose and mouth), prior to greeting individuals and/or touching or moving the casket. I understand these materials are hard to find and we must remember that our primary care givers are in desperate need of these materials as well. I recommend that you ask your funeral homes for their contacts and periodically check, funeral supply stores (i.e. search affordable funeral supplies on the web), Amazon, Home Depot, Lowes, and other supply stores.

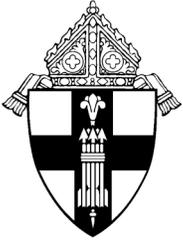


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2. If you cannot get the proper disposable masks, the CDC recommends using multiple layers of cloth for face coverings as long as they cover the nose and mouth, they are secured with ties or ear loops, that the outside of the material is not touched while in use, and the coverings are washed daily. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website via the following link for the instructions on how to make the proper face covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>;
3. There should be a designated cemetery worker, with a face covering (defined in #2 above) and disposable gloves, to disinfect the exterior of the casket while giving priority to the handles and sides that can come in contact with employees. Check the EPA database at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2> for disinfectants proven effective against the Coronavirus;
4. Social distancing is to be strictly enforced. Prohibit gatherings with more than 10 individuals (including all clergy) – this means 9 or less;
5. Gatherings are **not** to take place indoors in our cemetery chapels or facilities;
6. Have cemetery workers avoid contact with the families and funeral home employees and lower the casket after families have left the cemetery;
7. Keep all personnel and other individuals 6 feet apart;
8. Recommend that the bereaved remain in their cars, on the street, or on the curb during the committal;
9. Prohibit staff from riding in vehicles together – including cemetery trucks and other vehicles, and;
10. Ensure proper disposal of all protective equipment by carefully removing and placing them in plastic trash bags.

**Additional Precautions:** In addition to the above, I continue to offer the following for cemetery workers continuing in their ministries:

11. Remind cemetery workers to avoid touching their own face, mouths, nose, and eyes because it is also possible to contract the virus via a surface or object with the virus on it;
12. Continue to wash hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds or two Hail Mary's), especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing (into the arm), going to the bathroom, and before eating or preparing food;
13. When receiving mail, encourage staff to use gloves if possible. Move the mail to section labeled for the day of the week it was received and wait at least 24 hours before opening mail. Encourage opening Monday's mail on Wednesday, Tuesday's on Thursday, Wednesday's on Friday, Thursday's and Friday's on the following Monday;
14. Disinfect packages & boxes, by wiping them down with an alcohol wipe or spray with Lysol or similar disinfectant (see EPA link in #3 above for a list of effective disinfectants);
15. Remind staff that after handling mail, sorting mail, packages, boxes, or moving them, to wash their hands immediately with soap and water for 20 seconds thoroughly before touching anything else;
16. Continue wiping down surfaces, credit cards, pens, the interior of vehicles, equipment, tools and etc;
17. Encourage employees to stay home when sick, and send home those who report feeling ill or display symptoms;
18. When possible, administrative staff are to be encouraged to continue their operations remotely. The executive order states that essential staff that **can** work from home cannot be required to report to the organization's physical facility;
19. Post signs asking all those who enter the cemetery grounds not to engage cemetery workers and keep 6 feet apart from each other;



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20. Limit or prohibit public access to cemetery offices and other indoor facilities;
21. Limit lot sale presentations to “at need only” while keeping a six foot distance and encourage on-line or phone arrangements;
22. Suspend pre-need sales of lots and memorials unless they can be conducted on-line or by phone;
23. Keep families and staff informed of these precautionary measures – post friendly “reminder” signs in conspicuous locations;
24. Wear disposable gloves when handling a casket, equipment, burial permits, lot licenses, body receipts, payment, and when opening mail;
25. For our larger cemeteries schedule staff in rotating shifts, with one group staying home to ensure coverage in the event of staff illness, and;
26. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) site via the following link <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#funerals>. This site offers valuable information and is updated regularly.

Please know that we are indebted to you for carrying out one of the Church’s most essential ministries - to provide a sacred resting place for the faithful who await the Resurrection. While this is a difficult time for all of us, we remember that we are a community of faith, and together we will get through these most unusual times. Let us continue to pray for all those affected by this virus.

Be sure to visit my website to access all of the cemetery worker updates at <https://www.catholicnh.org/parishes/parish-life/catholic-cemeteries/coronavirus-cemeteries/>. As always, don’t hesitate to call or e-mail me with any questions or concerns at (603) 529-0481 or (603) 486-3038, or by email at [dgabert@rcbm.org](mailto:dgabert@rcbm.org).