



# Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America

A Province of the Congregation of Christian Brothers

March 25, 2020  
Feast of the Annunciation

## Coronavirus

Dear Brothers,

During this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic, you are much on our minds here in Elizabeth. This letter is not an attempt to give you facts or figures on Coronavirus. Those are all over our newspapers, television news and internet sites. Rather it is to reflect with you what Coronavirus might mean for our Province and how we should be responding. An exception to this is the list of Coronavirus Resources for Religious from the CMSM. This will be sent to you separately.

As you will be aware, one of the vulnerable groups is people over 60. As a province with a median age of 75 and few under 60, that includes almost all of us. So it is important for all of us to take very seriously the precautions being recommended or mandated by the government and health agencies. We are fortunate that as of today none of our brothers has tested positive, but this could change from one day to the next.

It is clear that aside from personal hygiene issues such as the washing of hands, social distancing is the single most effective way we can affect the spread of the virus. It means lifestyle changes, and these are not easy for any of us. But as men who live in communities, we need to all take these measures seriously for the good of all. St. Joseph's, where some of our most vulnerable men live, was among the first to move to social distancing and at this moment all of the men there are well.

A few practical comments:

### 1. Mass

The bishops have closed Churches for good reason. Gathering in groups is dangerous in this period. Devotion to Mass is a Christian Brother trait but this is not the time to go out to Mass even if you are able to find one. Please stay in and watch the Mass on television. The Pope is recommending a renewal of the idea of spiritual communion, uniting with the Eucharist while not being present. This can be difficult and will be difficult over the Easter period, but it is important that we maintain our distance.

### 2. Social distancing

While initially this can be restful, after a while it can become tedious. But it is effective in slowing the spread of the virus. Please stay away from your friends and family for a while. Keep in touch by phone, text or email. It is not fair in a community for someone to go out and socialize and then return to the community where others are trying to keep a distance. We are getting calls here in Elizabeth from brothers who are concerned about men in their community not taking social distancing

seriously and then returning to the community. This is also not the time to be visiting or welcoming visitors to the community. Let us help each other in social distancing.

### **3. Communication**

Communication is always a foundational element in community life. Now it is necessary more than ever. Referring to the previous number, if a man in your community is not taking social distancing seriously, little can be done here in Elizabeth. It is up to the community to talk about their response to social distancing and to tell the man how he is affecting them. No one will know what you are thinking as individuals or as a group unless they are told. It is more important now than ever to try to talk things out among ourselves.

### **4. “Cabin Fever”**

It is a human reality that when people are confined in a way they are not used to, tensions will arise among them. There are always little annoyances in community life, but our wider life distracts from them. When there is no wider life, little things can assume bigger proportions. Annoyances can be greater than usual. Here too communication can help. If we can speak with each other about how we are handling social distancing, we can come to realize we are all having parallel reactions. You are with each other for long periods these days. As you make time to pray, make some time also to talk to each other about what is happening and how it affects you personally.

### **5. Shopping and necessary appointments**

We are probably most exposed to infection these days when we must go out for shopping or necessary appointments. Some medical appointments are necessary. This is a good time not to attend routine appointments or those not immediately necessary. If it can be put off for a couple of months, do so. Some communities have a designated shopper and some share shopping chores. Each community will determine what works best for them, but this would be a wise time for younger and healthier community members to take the place of any older or less healthy men.

Brothers, there is a great sense of powerlessness in our nation at this time as we are given more and more information about the spread of a virus which we seem unable to control. But we can deal with it and we are dealing with it. All we really know is that staying in place, good hygiene and social distancing help and that we will be doing these things for an undetermined time.

On this Feast of the Annunciation let us pray together for our Congregation, our friends and families, our colleagues in ministry, our country and our world that the virus will pass, and that health and life might be restored.

Fraternally,

*Michael Colasunno*