

BISHOP'S OFFICE
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Tuesday, March 17, 2020

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your ongoing ministry to our people, especially now, when things — even simple things — have become difficult. At this time, it is so important for our people to know that we still want to be present to them in any way we can, even as we are challenged to learn and adapt to different forms of presence. The Mass is always present in some way throughout the world, and even locally, being celebrated every day throughout our diocese and by every priest. I am encouraging my priest brothers to continue the practice of celebrating Mass for their people at some point each day, either in church, unannounced, or some other space that is safe and in compliance with current public health regulations (see rcda.org/coronavirus).

I would ask you to encourage your parish families to pray together at home, at least 15 minutes a day. Families should be aware that as they pray together, they are not praying alone. We are joined with Jesus and one another in the Holy Spirit, in the Lord's eternal prayer to our Heavenly Father.

On the practical side, we have a lot of technology at our disposal. Let's use it! Working at and from home in the interests of family health and stability should be a goal — even when not in crisis. Responsible use of technology can strengthen family and parish life. When you think about it, working offsite may not be any more "remote" than many people working in little cubicles and departments, virtually in silos. There is always room for making better connections, even online. If possible, work with your staff and parish ministries to provide tutorials on the use of ZOOM and other such apps to bring families and parish staff and volunteers together virtually. I will be working with diocesan and parish support staff to develop ways of sharing such tools more widely.

The most important thing to remember is this: We are not alone. Jesus, fasting in the desert, was led there by the Holy Spirit — St. Mark uses the Greek word for "pushed" or "driven" — and always in communion with his Father. So also, we, led into this Lenten and historically challenging desert experience, remain in communion with Jesus and our Heavenly Father. We are being tempted, just as Jesus was, pulled in many different directions, but in the quiet can lend our ears to the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit.

Together we will move forward stronger, healthier and holier. As family, let's pray our way through this, share what we are learning and listen to the Holy Spirit, teaching and reminding each other and our people to look at Christ crucified and the mercy that flows from his side.

Your brother in Christ,

Bishop Ed

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY
Timely Liturgical Principles, Instructions & Guidelines
(relative to COVID-19 pandemic)
March 17, 2020

PRINCIPLES

Principles underlying the Instructions for each sacrament or liturgy as detailed below:

- Following the advice of entities such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the directives of governmental authorities (For example: limits to gathering size, following other guidelines such as hygiene/sanitizing, social distance etc.)
- Following Canon Law and General Liturgical norms
- Balancing an abundance of caution with pastoral and spiritual care. It is obviously the case that the sacraments and other liturgies give the gift of grace, as well as providing spiritual comfort and strength.
- Especially protecting the elderly and vulnerable and our priests.
- Engaging everyone in fulfilling our common responsibility for self-care and care of neighbor.
- Checking the Diocesan website for resources for praying at home, examples of 'spiritual communion', live-streaming Mass etc.
- Churches should remain open as much as possible to provide the opportunity for prayer
- These Instructions are subject to change as the situation develops

INSTRUCTIONS & GUIDELINES

HOLY EUCHARIST

- Mass "type" (for example, Lenten day, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions), to follow liturgical norms.
- Note that Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest or Holy Communion Services are also canceled, as well as Masses celebrated in public.
- Encourage priests to celebrate Mass daily (NOT publically) and to do this spontaneously and to avoid timetabling, so as to remain in keeping with governmental directives .
- Assure people that in those daily celebrations of Mass, even if not in public, the Mass intentions will be *pro populo* (for the people) so it is clear that those not in attendance are at the forefront of our minds. Previously requested Mass intentions may certainly be honored or they may be transferred.
- People have shown an affinity for Livestream Masses and those posted through social media like Facebook Live. Those Masses should be limited to a musician, cantor, lector, deacon, presider and someone recording the Mass. Invitation of a select congregation would appear unfairly exclusive to those not invited.
- Priests should not bring Holy Communion to the faithful outside of church other than viaticum.

- The Catholic faithful are encouraged to make a 'spiritual communion'. St. John Paul II writes that "it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*". This was the origin of the practice of 'spiritual communion', which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: 'When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you.'" (*Ecclesia Eucharistia*, no. 34)

BAPTISM

- The strong preference would be to reschedule. Baptisms may be celebrated provided that ALL the principles given above can be strictly adhered to. This would indicate individual baptisms outside of Mass with the immediate family. We have begun work on guidelines for Holy Week pertaining to those whose baptism is planned for the Easter Vigil.

CONFIRMATION

- All Confirmations have been postponed until further notice and will be rescheduled. The three Confirmations scheduled for March are definitively postponed. We have begun work on guidelines for Holy Week pertaining to those whose Confirmation is planned for the Easter Vigil.

RECONCILIATION

- NO communal reconciliation services.
- However, the sacrament may be celebrated provided that ALL the principles given above can be strictly adhered to, especially the matter of distance (a temporary space might be set up so that the principles are fulfilled).

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

- To be available wherever possible, especially to hospitals and nursing homes not covered by priest chaplains (being prepared to observe all the necessary protocols). Hospitals and nursing homes will allow those in danger of death to be anointed, but protective gear must be worn by the priest and the visit kept short.

WEDDINGS

- Weddings that are celebrated may be attended only by close family and in accordance with social distancing and capacity requirements.

FUNERALS

- Funerals may be attended only by close family and in accordance with social distancing and capacity requirements. Preference remains for the Funeral service to be a Mass. Families should be offered the opportunity to celebrate a memorial mass after restrictions have been lifted. Burial is always appropriate, but must adhere to guidelines

limiting attendance. Please ensure that the Funeral Directors know of these instructions.

SACRAMENTALS & DEVOTIONS (Stations of the Cross, Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Communal Adoration, etc.)

- As with public Masses, it can be very difficult to maintain the principles given above. Until further notice, there should be no COMMUNAL devotions, although individual/private devotions are strongly encouraged, whether in a church or at home. Perpetual Adoration Chapels should remain open where possible, provided that the principles listed above are maintained (numbers, capacity etc.)
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is an excellent way to connect the faithful to the Eucharist during this trying time. All liturgical norms should be followed as usual, including someone in constant attendance before the Eucharist. However, scheduling a specific time or announcing when benediction might occur may become a public health concern, especially as time goes on and more people become aware of the celebration.

CHRISM MASS

- We have already begun the process of exploring how Chrism Mass and the distribution of Holy Oils would be conducted if participants are limited at this Mass. Thank you for your patience; more information will be forthcoming.

HOLY WEEK

- We have already begun the process of exploring how Holy Week would be conducted if the faithful are not admitted to services or Masses. Thank you for your patience; more information will be forthcoming.

With the express approval of Bishop Scharfenberger, given at the Chancery: March 17, 2020

Latest Update: 2020-03-17 12:40pm

