



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP Diocese of Laredo

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Pastoral Statement from Bishop James A. Tamayo Regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

March 18, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you!

As the Shepherd of the Diocese of Laredo, I care deeply for your spiritual and physical well-being. Our present situation coincides with the liturgical season of Lent which is both a penitential season and a time of prayerful personal reflection. Our faith is rooted in a total surrender and trust in God who has never and will never abandon His people.

From the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, diocesan officials and I have been closely monitoring all official statements from the various agencies that have been entrusted with its response, ranging from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to local health departments. We agree with these agencies that the best way to curtail the spread of this virus is to work together.

Our priority and duty remains the protection of the Faithful through preventative measures. Previously, we took such measures to protect our worshipping communities. At this time, I feel it necessary to implement additional action.

Effective at 12:01 am on March 19, 2020, until further notice, the following are suspended:

- All regular public liturgical celebrations and gatherings
 - Daily and Sunday Mass. Catholics are dispensed from their moral obligation to attend Sunday Mass. **You will not be committing a sin by your absence from Sunday Masses during this time.**
 - Communal penance services
 - Individual confession will still be available in your parish Church or by appointment with your parish priest.
 - Devotional gatherings such as Stations of the Cross, recitation of the Rosary, Lenten mission talks, bible study groups, etc.

- Religious Education/Pastoral Formation
 - Weekly catechetical classes (children and adults)
 - Retreats for those receiving First Holy Communion or Confirmation
 - These may be rescheduled for a later date
 - Celebration of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are *postponed*
 - First Holy Communion Ceremonies can be rescheduled at the discretion of the Pastor who should take into consideration public health officials' recommendations.
 - Pastors should await rescheduling for Confirmations from the Bishop's Office
 - Youth Group gatherings
 - Pastoral Institute Courses
- Church Movements/Retreats
 - All activities including but not limited to retreats, fellowship gatherings, and pre-Cana meetings.
- Fundraisers
 - Jamaicas, Bingos, and other fundraising events are to be *postponed*

For the spiritual well-being of the Faithful,

- Baptisms, Funerals, Quinceañeras, and Weddings will need to be strictly limited to immediate family members not to exceed 10 persons, including the celebrant in accordance with public officials' restrictions.

The decision to suspend and postpone these pastoral activities has been made after much prayerful consideration. I know that community prayer and the sacraments of the Church are a source of great strength for the Faithful and that these measures will be painful for many. Our consolation in the face of this deep sadness must be that we are being given an opportunity to be united with the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. Our Savior began his ministry by going out into the desert alone and reminds us of our total dependence on the Father. "Whenever you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees what no man sees, will repay you." (Matthew 6:6)

Out of solidarity and in Christian charity, I urge all the Faithful to heed the instruction to not hoard food and supplies. Excessive buying is only perpetuating a problem and leaving some without access to the things that they need. In addition to what has already been expressed by public officials, I want to remind you, as your Shepherd, that excessive buying that concerns itself with only one's own needs at the exclusion of others constitutes a sin against charity. Likewise, social distancing embodies our call to care for all of our brothers and sisters. Let us be governed by Christian charity.

Now, more than ever, we must heed the words of Christ who told the Samaritan woman: "the hour is coming and is now here when true worshippers will worship the Father

in Spirit and truth.” (John 4:23) God remains ever present with us. I invite you to take solace in the interior spiritual life: to partake in spiritual communion, to pray the Holy Rosary, chaplets, novenas, and spiritual reading of the Bible. We will soon make available, through the Diocese of Laredo website (www.dioceseoflaredo.org), resources for private prayer. In a time of social distancing, we will find ourselves physically apart but our prayers will draw us spiritually closer to God and to each other. In my desire to remain close to each one of you, I will be offering the following prayer daily and invite you to spiritually join me in reciting this prayer.

*Almighty God, our patron St. Augustine once remarked that
“Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Look upon our
restless hearts that yearn for your comfort. Dispel the fear that
seeks to dampen our hope.*

*Through the centuries, we have witnessed your unending fidelity
and unceasing love for us. Help us to place all of our trust in
You.*

*Bless all those who have been affected by the Coronavirus
throughout the world. You are the Divine Physician that can heal
all illness.*

*May your Holy Spirit keep us united in your love and guide all
those who are working to protect us.*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, comfort us, your children.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

TUDO CON AMOR.

Most Reverend James A. Tamayo, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Laredo