



21 April 2020

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM BISHOP FABBRO

The Episcopal Council met this morning to consider many questions that have come forward from across the Diocese related to our current situation. It was obvious from the discussion that our priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers are working hard to meet the spiritual needs of our parishioners. These are some of the toughest times we have faced as a diocesan Church, but we remain firm in our faith that the Risen Lord is present among us, and walks with us on this journey of uncertainty and pain, giving us the joy of His presence, and hope for our future. In the spirit of communion, I am providing you with the following information which you can make available to your parishioners:

1. Continuation of the Lockdown

As has been said in earlier Updates, we are strictly following the direction of the Government of Ontario and local health authorities as to when the lockdown will be lifted. Premier Ford recently announced another four-week extension to the lockdown. Therefore, our churches will remain closed as they are until at least the end of May.

If the lockdown is lifted sooner, we will adjust our diocesan directives as we are able. We are aware, however, that there will likely be a gradual lifting of the lockdown.

2. Our Plan for Return to Services after the Lockdown

We are looking at the future, when we can once again gather with our communities to celebrate our faith and to offer our praise and thanks to God, in the celebration of the Mass and the sacraments. To this end, we are proposing a three-part method:

- a) Fr. Michael Béchard, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese, is working with a team to propose possible scenarios for our return to public worship. These scenarios will include, among other things, ideas for celebrating the sacraments of initiation, especially for those young people and adults who anticipated receiving these sacraments during the Easter Season.
- b) This plan will be presented to the Episcopal Council at next week's meeting, after which the Episcopal Vicars will be asked to consult on the deanery level.
- c) This consultation will help in setting a plan that will be based on consensus for the whole Diocese.

Therefore, I am asking that parish teams that are considering the reception of the sacraments not make decisions at this point, until a diocesan strategy is approved. The Episcopal Vicars emphasized that this is one of those areas where there is a need for solidarity in our approach. All parts of the plan will be in line with any governmental directives at the time.

An ancillary question was posed: When we are able to celebrate these sacraments, will a pastor who may have been moved be able to return to the former parish for the celebration? This decision will be left to the discretion of the new pastor.

3. Contributions for Pope Francis' COVID-19 Emergency Fund

Vatican News announced on Monday that the Holy Father has established an emergency fund to "aid those people and communities who are being tragically impacted by the spread of COVID-19." The Pope is particularly concerned for those in the global south who are experiencing great losses, but who have fewer resources than the north to deal with them.

Members of the Episcopal Council expressed concern about the many appeals that have been made already for COVID-related assistance. This item will remain on our agenda, but we await further news from the CCCB to see if there will be a Canada-wide appeal. Meantime, those wishing to make a donation to the Pope's emergency fund may do so through the Pontifical Mission Societies.

4. Platforms for On-line Meetings

Since the Diocese is using Microsoft Outlook for e-mail, all people with DOL accounts have access to Microsoft Teams for on-line meetings. We are not, however, prohibiting use of other platforms such as ZOOM.

Those choosing to use ZOOM should be mindful of some security concerns connected to it. Below are the "best practices" suggested for use of ZOOM:

- Do not post group pictures of your meeting on social media without consent from each participant.
- Be mindful of what is in your background during your meeting.
- Be aware of who can listen to your meeting.
- Use the options within Zoom to control screen/whiteboard sharing and who has access to your meeting (waiting room, password, distribution of link).
- When sharing screens, ensure no private information is open on your desktop.
- Take advantage of Western's complete list of Zoom best practices and other information on privacy and security at this [link](#). Zoom is addressing other customer concerns and those details can be found [here](#).

5. Resources for Pastoral Outreach

From the beginning of the lockdown, we have been providing pastoral resources for our new reality, through a designated page on our website. Members of the Pastoral Services team have worked with Communications to source, post, and draw attention to various ideas that have exploded on-line, including ideas that come from other dioceses and organizations.

This team is looking for feedback on the ideas that have been proposed, but also for any new ideas that might be of help. What is working in your parish? Where can members of our diocesan family go to find new ideas? We ask that if you have any feedback or new ideas to contact Matt Clarke at mclarke@dol.ca.

6. Lawn-cutting and other Outdoor Services

Our latest information from municipalities and the province has resulted in updated instructions for all parishes and cemeteries. These instructions apply to employees, volunteers and lawn cutting companies:

- a) Landscaping and lawn care strictly for safety, security or sanitation purposes will be allowed.
- b) These services include lawn cutting (please cut as low as possible so you do not have to cut as often), dethatching, rolling, clearing yard and garden debris, topping up low spots (especially at our cemeteries) and trimming/cutting of trees. These instructions are to ensure that properties remain safe, that property standards are met and that grass is maintained to help prevent ticks, mosquitoes and standing water.
- c) Planting of any kind is not permitted, including seeding, sodding, flowers, annuals, perennials and trees. Watering and fertilizing is not permitted. Landscaping projects that are to beautify or for aesthetics are not permitted.

Please ensure proper COVID-19 precautions are taken, including staying six feet away from each other (physical distancing), washing hands with soap and water frequently (for at least 20 seconds) or hand sanitizing and cleaning and disinfecting high touch areas frequently.

7. Inauguration of New Families of Parishes

While many of the recently-named Families for implementation are ready to go into action, the inauguration of those new Families of Parishes and other pastoral moves will be delayed. We need to wait until such time as we are able to have Ordinations of our transitional deacons, and to accept priests from off-shore who have been assigned to work in our parishes. There may be exceptions to this delay, based on circumstances.

8. Hearing Confessions

Some have asked about the possibility of hearing Confessions in the midst of the lockdown. We remain firm that we must respect the strict limits of the lockdown in order to prevent further spread of the coronavirus. Health authorities are convinced that they still do not know all the ways the virus is spreading, and it is highly possible that a priest could become the conduit for spreading the virus when hearing Confessions.

While it is a good and holy thing to seek the forgiveness of God through the sacrament of Penance, the faithful need to be reminded that God's mercy is not limited to any celebration of the sacraments. God's mercy is rich and overflowing, as Pope Francis has reminded us again and again. In quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he iterated the long-standing teaching of the Church that God welcomes every sinner with open arms. We can go directly to God, be specific about our sins, request pardon, and experience God's loving forgiveness (20 March, #7).

9. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

While there are varying practices across the Diocese with respect to hospital and nursing home policies, it is important to follow the directives of the local health authority, hospital or nursing home. In some cases, priests are allowed to anoint COVID-19 patients; in some cases only non-COVID patients. These directives may change on a daily basis, so vigilance in checking with the above-named authorities is essential.

The best pastoral approach is one that conveys a message of God's mercy and forgiveness especially when the sacraments cannot be celebrated. This is a message that is important for patients and families alike.

10. Catholic Education Week (4-8 May)

Our Catholic schools, operating in virtual reality, will still be celebrating Catholic Education Week. I am preparing a message that will be recorded and made available to all of our School Boards for that Week. Bishop Joseph is going to celebrate Masses in English and French for our schools as well; these Masses will be recorded and made available to all our Boards. Please keep this intention in mind as you celebrate Mass and offer other prayer at that time.

In closing, I want to assure you that Bishop Joseph and our Episcopal Vicars join me in offering our prayers for you and your ministry at this challenging time. We will continue our regular meetings and welcome your input. I remind you to forward any questions you might have to your Episcopal Vicar.

I am adding a [prayer](#), written by members of our diocesan team, which you may wish to make available to parishioners, family members or friends.

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

Diocese of London: Being a mission-oriented Church that forms disciples of Jesus

