



## URGENT MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, Religious Houses

From: Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas

Re: Temporary Suspension of All Publicly Celebrated Masses and Liturgies

Date: 16 March 2020

*He always showed compassion for children and for the poor, for the sick and for sinners, and he became a neighbor to the oppressed and the afflicted. By word and deeds he announced to the world that you are our Father and that you care for all your sons and daughters  
(Preface: Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs IV).*

In order best to safeguard the Catholic faithful and the greater community from the serious threat and spread of the Coronavirus/COVID-19, Bishop Daniel E. Thomas, in union with the Bishops of Ohio, has decreed **all publically celebrated Masses and other liturgies in the Diocese of Toledo will be temporarily suspended**. This decree is effective immediately and will remain in place at least through the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020. All the faithful are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time in accord with the Code of Canon Law.

It was only after consultation with the Governor and public health officials, that this unprecedented painful decision needed to be made immediately in order to protect the health and well-being of our communities. With you I am heartbroken that such a decision had to be made, but trust that this sacrifice, for the greater good, will be received with charity and understanding and will, ultimately serve to unite us ever more closely with Christ, the Suffering Servant.

Priests are privately to offer daily Mass on behalf of the people entrusted to their spiritual care. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “Mass should not be celebrated without a minister, or at least one of the faithful, except for a just and reasonable cause” (no. 254). The current health crisis constitutes a “just and reasonable cause.”

Parishes are encouraged to continue livestreaming Masses (Sunday and/or daily) if that is their current practice, and others should examine the possibilities of utilizing social media to best reach the faithful at this critical time.

While every priest is required to provide the option of “anonymous” or “face-to-face” confession, when celebrating the individual rite of the sacrament of penance (e.g. Days of Grace, the Light is On), penitents may be strongly encouraged to confess anonymously.

Funeral and wedding liturgies, in so far as possible, should be celebrated with the presence of the fewest members of the faithful (e.g. immediate family). Please use your sound pastoral judgement and prudence when making decisions regarding these liturgies.

Further guidance concerning the liturgies of Holy Week will be forthcoming. However, it is our hope that the Elect and Candidates for Full Communion could be initiated sometime within the Easter Season.

All parishes and institutions are invited to inform their people of the various ways they can access livestreaming/broadcast of Masses/liturgies via the internet, television or radio. This information should be broadly disseminated to the faithful using the most effective means possible (social media, email, signage).

In these extraordinary times we are called upon to take extraordinary measures. We have never faced such a global health crisis in our lifetime. While we may have to refrain temporarily from reception of the Holy Eucharist, it is my sincere hope that such a sacrifice will serve not to divide us but to unite us in our deeper love and appreciation for the Holy Eucharist as well as a deeper love for and communion with our neighbor.

I encourage you to join me in addressing this pandemic with a renewed vigor in exercising the great pillars of the Lenten Season through intensified weekly prayer (in particular the Stations of the Cross), serious weekly fasting, and weekly almsgiving for so many in need at this time, so that the Father, who sees and hears in secret, will repay us.