



DIOCESE OF VICTORIA

Office of the Bishop

March 17, 2020

To All Clergy, Religious and Laity in the Diocese of Victoria in Texas

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In accordance with the guidelines of President Trump and our local authorities, I am requiring that priests begin celebrating Masses without a congregation. All people can join in spiritual communion from their homes, with the assurance that the sacrifice of praise is being offered for the health and salvation of the world. Indeed, the salvation of souls remains the mission of the Church, and we follow these guidelines specifically for that mission.

National, state and local government officials have stressed the need to limit the number of people who can gather in one place at the same time. The call is to act responsibly for the protection of all in our communities. **Therefore, effective today, and until March 31, our priests in the Diocese of Victoria will continue to daily celebrate the Eucharist in their parishes, but will do so *without* a congregation.**

This decision was made after much prayer and discernment, recognizing that large gatherings are a factor in the spread of this disease. Therefore, in order to discourage public gatherings, I decree that ALL Catholics of the Diocese of Victoria in Texas are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligations, until March 31.

The Mass is televised live from the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory in Victoria on Sundays at 9 a.m. on KAVU television and live-streamed at www.olvcathedral.org. In addition, the 8 a.m. Sunday Mass from Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Hallettsville is broadcast on Texas Thunder Radio (99.9 FM) or by downloading the free TUNEIN app to hear the Mass. In addition, there are national broadcasts of the Sunday Mass on various cable networks. Though not able to attend Mass, the faithful are encouraged to pray in their homes. Spiritual Communion can also be made at any time. In doing so, we unite ourselves to God and the Church in prayer, when unable to physically receive the Holy Eucharist.

I encourage us to catechize and evangelize using modern communication methods. Especially as we deal with issues of fear, suffering and death, our teaching from Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church offers hope in Jesus Christ.

Visits to the homebound, nursing care facilities and hospitals are also discouraged, except in cases of pastoral necessity and emergencies. When visiting such facilities, clergy and others are to follow protocols set by the Center for Disease Control, in regard to good hygiene practices, before, during and after such visits.

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All scheduled events in our parishes are also cancelled, so as to protect the faithful from possible infection. This includes Penance Services, Stations of the Cross, RCIA, religious education classes, adult formation classes and any and all other liturgical gatherings, meetings and activities. If parishes are able to conduct meetings and instruction by virtual means, they are encouraged to do so. Pastors are encouraged to teach and maintain contact with their parishioners using social media and other forms of technology, where and if this is possible.

Weddings, funerals and baptisms will continue, but attendance will be limited to ten (10) immediate family members. Confirmations will be postponed and rescheduled.

Our parish churches and missions will remain open for private prayer and Adoration, as long as this does not pose a risk to the public. Protocols for social distancing are to be practiced.

In emergencies, and for the Anointing of the Sick, parishioners are to call their parish offices. When possible, parish offices will remain open to address the needs of parishioners, though hours of service and circumstances will vary in each parish.

I ask the faithful to continue to support their parish community through on-line giving or by mail. This will ensure parishes are able to meet payrolls and pay monthly bills.

These directives will be reviewed on April 1 to determine whether or not Holy Week services will be open to the public.

Stringent measures must be taken in situations of national emergencies. May these efforts, difficult as they are, be our way, in the Diocese of Victoria, of helping to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Let us pray for those who have died from this disease, for the healing of those who have been affected by it throughout the world and for an abrupt end to it. We turn to our loving God and implore his protection. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

Let's keep each other in prayer.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Brendan Cahill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Bishop Brendan J. Cahill