



Diocese of Rockford

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Office of the Bishop

March 13, 2020

Dear Priests, Deacons and Parishioners,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; in all your ways be mindful of Him, and He will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

In response to the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Diocese of Rockford, its parish communities and schools have implemented its guidelines for *Influenza and the Liturgy* to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. With further guidance from the Center for Disease Control and, more recently, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, and in reviewing the guidance of the health departments of the counties comprising the Diocese, taking into account our pastoral mission and service to all members of the faithful and the public, I am hereby issuing the following statement.

In times of difficulty such as our current concerns about the coronavirus, recourse to prayer and the sacraments is a strength and a consolation enabling us to trust God. Nevertheless, in view of the guidance given to address the spread of the virus, a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is granted to all who are suffering from any underlying medical condition. In particular, any who are not feeling well because of symptoms of cold or flu or who have compromised immune systems are dispensed from attending Mass.

The same dispensation from Sunday Mass is granted to all who are 60 years old or older given their increased vulnerability to the coronavirus.

Finally, any persons of any age who, in the current circumstances, are in any way uncomfortable in gatherings involving a large number of people are similarly dispensed from the obligation of Sunday Mass.

These dispensations are for the weekends of March 15, 22 and 29, and will be reviewed as needed in light of developments and further guidance.

For any who avail themselves of this dispensation, they are asked to substitute a time of prayer at home, possibly including watching a televised Mass or reviewing the Readings of the Mass of Sunday in order to continue to join their spiritual lives to the prayer of the Church throughout the world.

Pastors are asked to consider other steps to help reduce the number of people gathering for Mass such as temporarily adding additional Masses or publicizing the Mass schedules of nearby parishes where Mass attendance may be less crowded.

Further, for the next three weekends, parishes are directed to:

- Suspend all physical contact at the exchange of the sign of peace.
- Suspend holding hands at the Our Father – a gesture not prescribed in the Roman Missal.
- Suspend the distribution of the Precious Blood of Christ via the chalice.
- Sanitize and regularly refresh water in holy water fonts or temporarily drain the fonts completely.

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All non-sacramental parish events should be cancelled until further notice. Also, all athletic events and practices, extra-curricular activities, retreats and Religious Education classes and events sponsored in our parishes and by parish schools should be cancelled until further notice. The Bishop Lane Retreat Center will also be closed until further notice.

All sacramental retreats are also cancelled immediately. Those preparing for sacraments should be allowed to advance to the sacraments given this extraordinary situation.

I, your Bishop, will continue to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. However, arrangements will be made to do so without the celebration of Mass, with the attendance of the candidates and his or her immediate family members only. Proxies may stand in for sponsors who are non-immediate family members.

Diocesan Catholic elementary and high schools will suspend classes beginning Monday, March 16, 2020, until further notice. The schools will implement e-learning at that time. Further guidance for the schools sponsored by the Diocese of Rockford will be issued by the Office of Catholic Education.

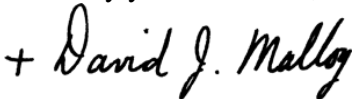
Parishes are encouraged to work with their employees to permit remote working to the extent practical until further notice. The Diocesan Administration Center will remain open and all services to the parishes and schools will continue, but the building will be closed to visitors.

All diocesan ministries are directed to use their emergency preparedness plans as necessary and to continually monitor and cooperate with local public health officials on best practices. I also ask each Catholic to exercise personal responsibility in keeping themselves, their families and fellow parishioners healthy and safe.

As this situation continually changes and evolves, the Diocese of Rockford is prepared to take additional steps if necessary to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and will communicate that information as necessary through the parishes, diocesan website, newspapers and social media. Please continue to communicate regularly at your parishes on how to stay healthy both physically and spiritually during this current pandemic.

Please pray for all of the sick, especially those most affected by the current viral outbreak. Pray also for the medical personnel who treat them and for all who minister to them.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford