



Diocese of Lincoln Guidelines for Coronavirus (COVID-19) March 17, 2020

This document captures the most recent guidance from the Diocese of Lincoln regarding the coronavirus and the steps that should be taken to stop its spread.

On March 16, the Diocese of Lincoln announced that due to the new coronavirus limitations in place from our local, state, and national governments, effective immediately, all public Masses and communal celebration of the sacraments or other liturgies are indefinitely suspended in the Diocese of Lincoln.

On March 16, general guidelines were also communicated to diocesan priests to help inform pastoral decisions in light of this suspension of public liturgies. Here are those guidelines:

1. The Sunday Mass obligation is dispensed by Archbishop Lucas for all Catholics in the Diocese of Lincoln.
2. Churches and chapels may remain open for private prayer. Protocol for social distancing must be observed.
3. Communal Penance services should be cancelled; however, priests are encouraged to make confessions available in outdoor or open-air spaces if the priest is not in a high-risk category. (This policy was slightly modified below).
4. No parish religious education programs are to assemble.
5. No parish public events or gatherings that exceed ten persons.
6. Weddings should be restricted to ten or less persons.
7. Funerals should be restricted to immediate family and friends, less than ten attending.

The Diocese of Lincoln offers updated guidance in response to the following questions and issues:

Mass

The purpose of this time of distancing is to stop the spread of a legitimately life-threatening illness. While celebrating funerals and already scheduled weddings within the new limitations is reasonable, other celebrations are to be set aside temporarily. In the guidelines sent out March 16, we said that priests should still offer the Mass privately. Do not publish your Mass times, but you may keep your personal schedule in the parish with doors unlocked. Please don't hold communion services on Sunday. If people convene on Sunday, it is recommended to lead the faithful in a spiritual communion, give them a blessing and dismiss.

Communion to the Homebound

Acolytes and EMHC are not permitted at this time to hold Communion services, for others or for their own families. Visiting the homebound should also be suspended, unless in the case of danger of death, since the purpose of this time is to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Where possible, it is strongly encouraged that the homebound receive phone calls to reach out to them.

The strong desire to receive the Blessed Sacrament is a proper and beautiful thing. However, this suspension will not be forever. In order to do our part to stop the spread of the coronavirus, we should encourage parishioners to read the scripture, to pray together as families, and to make spiritual communion.

Perpetual Adoration

Our churches should remain open as usual for people to stop in and pray. The continuation of Perpetual Adoration is left to the discretion of the pastor. However, adorers must be of sound health and there should be no more than ten people at a time. Adoration should be held in the main church and not in small chapels.

Confession

Confessions should take place, but they should be scheduled in such a way that groups do not congregate. Do not use the standard confessionals. Rather, confessions should be heard in the open air or a large room. Parishes with the tradition of hearing large numbers of confessions might consider using an usher to help manage the crowds.

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Funerals

These are limited to ten, including the priest. There are a couple of options. A priest could have ten total persons present and livestream the funeral for others. The burial could be celebrated now, and a Mass of Christian Burial in the absence of the body or a memorial Mass could be celebrated later.

Weddings

These, too, are limited to ten, including the priest. A priest could have ten total persons present and livestream the wedding for others.

Baptisms

These can take place, but they should be limited to no more than ten people in the church.

Duration of the crisis

We are uncertain how long this suspension of public liturgies will last.

Livestreamed Masses

Livestreamed Masses are a great way to keep some sense of community during this time of suspension of public liturgies. Father Andrew Heaslip is working on directives on how to live stream on Facebook live and other platforms.

Televised Masses

A reminder that a Mass for shut-ins is televised every Sunday in the Lincoln area on KLKN-TV at 9:00 a.m. and in the Hastings area on KSNB-TV at 9:30 a.m.

CCD

Father Heaslip will offer guidance on how to offer CCD instruction while CCD classes are postponed. He will email CCD coordinators about how to facilitate instruction during this time.

Chrism Mass

The Chrism Mass scheduled for April 6 will be celebrated privately. The Sacred Oils will be distributed thereafter.

Confirmations

All Confirmations scheduled through March are postponed.

Chancery/Diocesan Offices

Building access for both the Chancery and the John XXIII Diocesan Center are closed to the public. Non-essential meetings and activities to be held at the Chancery or John XXIII Diocesan Center are cancelled until further notice. We will maintain telephone reception service at both buildings during this period if you need to call the Chancery.

Anointing of the Sick

The administration of the Anointing of the Sick should continue to take place. The diocesan protocols in *Steward of the Mysteries* should be followed. Priests who are not healthy should find another priest to administer an anointing. If a priest is refused access to a facility, especially in danger of death, contact Mr. Heath Boddy, the president of the Nebraska Health Care Association at 402-540-7032.

At-home resources

Parishes are encouraged to use technology to connect with parishioners at this time. More information and instruction will be provided by various diocesan offices to do this. If your parish uses *formed.org*, it would be helpful to promote that.

Works of Charity

As Catholics, we can be a light in this time of darkness through the practice of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. Some ideas include:

- Expanding outreach in the parish by making phone calls to homebound neighbors and nursing home residents.
- Praying with others over the phone.
- Offering to go grocery shopping for others who need to stay at home.
- Increase giving to Catholic Social Services, local foodbanks, and St. Vincent de Paul.
- Consider donating blood or plasma.

We will get through this time of crisis through the grace of God. Let us invoke the intercession and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the health and well-being of our brothers and sisters who are ill, for their caretakers, and for all doctors, nurses, medical and emergency preparedness personnel and elected officials.