



DIOCESE OF BAKER

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Baker,

Grace to you and peace in the midst of world-shaking uncertainty. I hope this finds you in good health and, more importantly, in good spirits, as we continue our journey to Easter through a Lent like no other.

I write to update you on important information regarding upcoming liturgical celebrations from the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome. (Quotations in the following paragraphs are from the official document unless otherwise specified.)

1. “The Easter Triduum . . . cannot be transferred to another time.”
2. The local bishop may postpone the Chrism Mass to a later date, and that is what this bishop is doing. We’ll wait until the crisis has passed and all the priests can gather fearlessly for the renewal of priestly promises and the blessing of the holy oils. When that will be, no one can say. But the day will come! And we hope you can too.
3. With regard to the Holy Week, “in the Cathedral and in parish churches, *though without the physical participation of the faithful*, the Bishop and parish priest(s) can celebrate the liturgical mysteries” on the three holy days. “The faithful should be informed of the times of the celebration so that they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes.” For these occasions “live (not recorded) televisual or internet broadcasts are helpful.”
4. Holy Thursday. “The faculty to celebrate Mass on this day in a suitable place, *without the people*, is granted in an exceptional manner to all priests. *The washing of feet . . . is to be omitted*. At the end of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper *the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is to be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle.*”
5. Good Friday. Insofar as “there is a real possibility of doing so” (that is, without exceeding the number of people permitted at social gatherings when that day comes), “the Bishop/Parish Priest will celebrate the Passion of the Lord. In the Universal Prayer, the Bishop will see to it that there is a special intention for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed.”

6. Easter Vigil. Here too it will be necessary to respect the social gathering limits in force at the time in selecting a much reduced number of servers and lectors. “At ‘The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil’ *the preparation and lighting of the fire is omitted, the Paschal Candle is lit, the procession is omitted and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) follows.* The ‘Liturgy of the Word’ then takes place” as usual. “For the ‘Baptismal Liturgy’ the ‘Renewal of Baptismal Promises’ alone is necessary. The ‘Liturgy of the Eucharist’ then follows.”
7. Easter Sunday. Mass will be celebrated as usual, but without the presence of the people.

In a recent memo Archbishop Leonard Blair of Hartford, Chairman of the Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship, had some additional clarifications. For the Adoration of the Holy Cross on Good Friday, he suggested, “it will surely be best, if more than one person is assisting, to *express reverence to the Cross without kissing or touching it.* A genuflection or profound bow would be appropriate.”

With regard to the RCIA, Archbishop Blair notes that the Rite itself “includes provision for a delay in the celebration of the sacraments” and other options such as the following: “the bishop can dispense from the Scrutinies . . . ;” he “can permit an abbreviated form of initiation . . . ; and the rites can be celebrated at other times of the year.” This bishop elects to do all of the above. Therefore, the *Rites of Initiation for the 2020 Easter Vigil will not take place in the Diocese of Baker until pastors receive the go-ahead from the bishop.* Once we know when it will be possible again to assemble together in Church, each parish will be free to work out its own schedule of initiation to best accommodate its own particular circumstances. We will not attempt to replicate the Easter Vigil—every parish celebrating on the same date—but rather each parish will choose the best date for itself.

Finally, a word about Confirmations. We will not adhere to the current schedule, and there are too many uncertainties to put together another one at present. The new arrangements will probably involve a mixture of my delegating individual pastors to confirm their own parishioners with deanery-wide celebrations (multiple parishes at one time) at which I will officiate. More details when they become possible to devise.

I hope this letter has clarified some uncertainties and relieved some anxieties. There are more than enough of both floating around in the COVID-19 world. But God knows how to bring us through them to peace in His will. Let us pray for the wisdom to follow His lead.

In Christ our Redeemer,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Liam Cary".

Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker