

3/19/20

Following the recommendations released by the Centers of Disease Control to “cancel large events or gatherings that could contribute to the spread of COVID-19,” Bishop Walker Nickless issued the mandate to suspend all Sunday and public Masses effective immediately.

This suspension will extend for eight weeks, and then will be re-evaluated as the coronavirus situation develops. The CDC recommends no gathering of groups of 50 or larger during this crisis, whereas **the State of Iowa has mandated gatherings of groups no larger than 10**. Parishes within the diocese will resume normal activities when it is safe to do so.

“This has been the most difficult decision I have made during my time as bishop,” Bishop Nickless explained after making the decision to cancel all Masses, which will include Holy Week, the high point of the Catholic Church’s liturgical year. “The health and well-being of all people in the diocese, as well as all Catholics, is of the utmost importance at this time. I ask all the faithful for their understanding and to join me in prayer for the end to this public health crisis.”

During this period, Catholics in the Diocese of Sioux City are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, according to the bishop’s mandate.

Liturgical and parish guidelines for this 8-week period will include:

- Celebration of public Masses - All public celebrations of the Mass will be suspended. Pastors are encouraged to broadcast private Masses via electronic means for their parishioners.
- Holy Week – Holy Week liturgies are suspended. **New directives have been received from the Vatican and details will be released soon.**
- Baptisms – Baptisms will only be celebrated with immediate family and godparents. There will be no large group baptisms.
- Weddings – Only immediate family members and witnesses are to attend weddings. Clergy are not to attend related social functions. Parishes are not to host receptions.
- Funerals – Funerals may be celebrated only with immediate family members. Parishes may not host funeral dinners.
- Confessions - The sacrament of reconciliation (confession) will be conducted by appointment only.
- Sacrament of Confirmation - All spring celebrations of the sacrament of confirmation are suspended.
- First Communion - The celebrations of First Communion are suspended.
- Quinceañeras - Quinceañeras are suspended.
- Eucharistic Adoration - The formal exposition of the Eucharist or adoration will be suspended.
- **The Eucharist - Will be administered to the sick only as viaticum (danger of death).**

Additional Directives:

- **Church buildings are to be closed.**
- All conferences, retreats, festivals or similar events in the diocese and the parishes are to be suspended.
- All religious education, faith formation classes, RCIA and related activities are suspended.
- Parish staff are to conduct meetings if essential, and if possible, electronically.
- Parish staff members are asked to telecommute, if possible.
- Parish governing boards are strongly urged to meet electronically.

