



Bishop allows limited church opening for private prayer

Bishop Walker Nickless has authorized the opening of certain churches for private prayer in the diocese starting June 15. This is the first opening of church buildings since the bishop declared the suspension of public Masses and parish gatherings effective March 16 due to the coronavirus outbreak. The opening is optional and at the discretion of the pastors of the diocese.

The opening will have restrictions for the health and safety of all:

- Effective at 6 am. June 15, pastors may open the main church in their parish grouping for private prayer for a period not to exceed two hours twice a week.
- At no time during this prayer time may more than 10 people be present in the church. Pastors are to ensure the open church prayer periods are monitored.
- All social distancing rules should be pursued, and masks are required for those utilizing the churches for private prayer.
- Priests and deacons should avoid participating in these open periods of prayer to allow for up to 10 parishioners.
- Pastors should ensure that the proper sanitization of the pews and church fixtures occurs during and after the periods of prayer according to public health and CDC regulations.
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is prohibited during these time periods.
- Church openings for private prayer are not to be conducted two days in a row. Instead one or more days of closure should be scheduled in between each open prayer event.
- This opening for private prayer is optional and at the pastor's discretion. Pastors may also reduce the time for these events to any length less than two hours.
- Pastors in known areas of high positive COVID case counts should consider not opening. In addition, pastors in communities that are experiencing spikes in positive cases should consider not opening or suspending the private prayer times if they are underway.
- All pastors should be poised to close their churches for private prayer if directed by the bishop due to surges in positive cases returning to our diocese.

Cutline: Father Peter Nguyen praying at St. Joseph Church, Sioux City prior to a Vietnamese liturgy. He is the associate pastor at Holy Cross Parish in Sioux City. Certain churches in the Diocese of Sioux City may open for limited private prayer starting next week at the discretion of individual pastors.