



DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

Office of the Vicar General & Moderator of the Curia

MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests and Deacons; All Parishes; Staff of the SJNPC; Catholic Charities and Cemeteries

From: Father Timothy Christy, VG

Date: March 22, 2020

RE: Covid-19 Update and Governor Murphy's Executive Order 108

Yesterday, Governor Philip Murphy signed an executive order which places further restrictions on residents of New Jersey. These restrictions have further impact on the operation of our parishes, offices, cemeteries and social ministries in the Diocese of Metuchen.

Livestreaming of Masses/Stations– Given Governor Murphy's executive order – only the resident clergy and one technician may be present for any live-streamed Mass/Prayer Service.

Diocesan Operations – the SJNPC will remain closed to all non-essential personnel until further notice. The second floor will remain open to SPUH staff. Limited diocesan staff will have access to the first floor on an as need basis in part to support the vital services being provided by SPUH and the Diocese. Department heads and Secretaries should be in contact with your staff. Those who will have access to the building can enter with their badge; all others' badges have been turned off. If for some reason you need access to the building – you may email Steve Michalek at Smichalek@diometuchen.org – who in turn will communicate the request to our Chancellor, Anthony Kearns to make a determination. Please note the building will be closed to the public and the dining room will remain closed until further notice.

Parish and School Operations – all parish and school offices are to be closed and parishioners/parents are to be informed that the office is closed. It is vital that the resident priests remain available and responsive to the faithful. Those things that can be handled by phone or email must be handled by the resident clergy or by parish employees working from home. Obviously pastoral emergencies will arise where you will need to make a prudential judgment on meeting a parishioner's sacramental need. More specific directions are being prepared regarding specific concerns around penance and anointing of the sick.

Funerals, Weddings and Baptisms – public funeral Masses, weddings, baptisms and other gatherings are now prohibited by the Governor's executive order.

Funerals - while a public memorial can be scheduled for a later date, the burial of the dead will need to occur before that date – our cemeteries will remain open subject to some changes of hours due to staffing concerns. A committal service should take place outside in the cemetery or outside of Mausoleum with the priest and must be limited to 10 persons. The pastor/priest will celebrate a private Mass without a congregation on the day of burial, if no public memorial is scheduled and/or if the family requests it, and the priest will inform the family that he has or will do so.

Weddings – all weddings are to be postponed. Since reception halls are prevented from serving their clientele, most couples will choose to postpone their wedding. As all municipal buildings are likewise closed, marriage licenses will be difficult to obtain. If you have questions about a specific wedding, please contact me at 908-399-0643 and leave a message with your contact information.

If a dispensation or permission has been received for a wedding that needs to be postponed, the dispensation or permission will remain in force. If you would like the letter re-issued with the new date, please return it to the Bishop's Office with that request. If you retain the dispensation or permission, please attach a letter on parish stationery explaining that the wedding date was changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Baptisms – all baptisms are to be postponed except in the case of emergency. A reminder ALL HOLY WATER IS TO BE REMOVED FROM THE CHURCH.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – Our Churches will remain open for private prayer. The faithful are encouraged to engage social distancing practices and disinfectant wipes should be provided for the person to wipe down their space where they were praying. While the Bishop had previously asked for a period of Eucharistic Adoration each day, if a limited time of Eucharistic Adoration encourages more people to come at the same time, then it should not be done. Pastors should use their discretion.

Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Triduum and Easter – instructions for the celebration of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, the Sacred Triduum and Easter Sunday will be issued by Decree of the Bishop in the near future.

Parish Operations and Finances – guidelines and suggestions about parish operations and parish finances will be issued in the near future through the Vicariate for Temporal Affairs.

Planning – while none of us knows how long these restrictions will be in place, it is very likely that they will be in effect for some time. It appears a miracle is needed and needed quickly to get us back in Church for Holy Week. You may want to begin preparations for postponing First Holy Communion and other events that are scheduled for April and at least the first half of May. One practical consideration may be to cancel your Easter Flower orders. Palms, if already ordered, can be blessed at your private Palm Sunday Mass and distributed after our people return to Church.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your question may well be the question of another pastor as well. This is a fluid and ever evolving situation which will require clarification and direction.

Again, Bishop is most grateful for your leadership and for the creativity that many of you are expressing in finding new ways to reach out to your parishioners and the faithful throughout the diocese. The Bishop considers the Diocese blessed because of your commitment and leadership in building up the Kingdom of God, even in such difficult and challenging times. You may be the only sign of hope for our people in these sad times as you bring them to our Lord and Savior!