



Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

P.O. BOX 12047
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA 35202-2047

2121 3RD AVENUE NORTH
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA 35203
TELEPHONE 205-838-8322

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Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious, Seminarians, and all Faithful People of the Diocese:

With the recent dramatic increase in the rate of COVID-19 infections in North Alabama, affecting many members of our Catholic community also, I wish to take this opportunity to remind everyone – but especially our pastors – about the safety best practices that are available to guide us through this challenging time.

- The Alabama Department of Public Health has provided recommended guidelines for places of worship, to slow or prevent the spread of infection. These may be downloaded at <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/assets/cov-sah-worship.pdf>.
- Those individuals who have a fever and/or feel sick, are in a high-risk group (e.g., immunocompromised or having another serious underlying health condition), are of a more advanced age, or who live with someone in one of these categories, are urged to avail themselves of the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass that I recently renewed for all Roman Catholics living in the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama.
- Pastors and administrators should heed any applicable local ordinances (for example, about the use of masks) in determining how to apply safety best practices to their congregations.
- Because there is a dispensation, it is permissible for any pastor to cancel public Masses temporarily if he judges there is a serious enough reason to do so (e.g., he was exposed to COVID-19 or tested positive for it).
- Social distancing should be observed in our churches – e.g., roping off every other pew, having space between people of different households, etc.
- The physical exchange of the sign of peace should continue to be omitted. Moreover, there should not be an offertory procession of the gifts of bread and wine. If ushers take up a collection, they should use baskets with handles or similar, to avoid having baskets be passed between parishioners. E-giving is to be encouraged.
- Communion should continue to be distributed to the faithful under the form of the host only. The minister of holy communion may wear a mask; those receiving communion should lower their masks immediately before receiving. Gloves may never be worn by minister or communicant.
- Where possible, outdoor Masses may be held, being careful to safeguard the sacredness of the liturgy and avoiding any spectacle or casualness.

The Lord is near and He will bring us through this trial. Let us not grow weary or lax, but persevere in His service as we seek the good of all!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Steven J. Raica, J.C.D.
Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama