



March 18, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

State Officials have communicated to religious leaders that the next two weeks are critical for the containment of the COVID-19/coronavirus and that all congregational gatherings should be avoided. While I am sure that the advice is startling for those of any creed, it particularly hits hard for Catholics, given our beliefs about the Mass and the Eucharist.

In light of that advice, after consulting with the Presbyteral Council and College of Consultors, and having learned that an active parish priest in another U.S. diocese has tested positive for the virus - unknowingly putting his parish at risk prior to the manifestation of any symptoms - I have made the difficult decision to suspend all regularly scheduled public celebrations of Mass in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul Minneapolis, effective immediately. Given both the moral impossibility of attending Mass, as well as the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass that was extended to the faithful of the Archdiocese last week, please rest assured that the missing of Mass in these conditions should not weigh on your conscience.

Anticipating that the need might arise for a funeral or wedding Mass in this period, a limited exception has been granted for those liturgies, provided that any liturgical celebration would comply with the directives that will be issued in a memorandum to clergy of the Archdiocese.

It pains my heart to have to make this decision since I know how many of you deeply love the Mass as I do. This decision will be re-evaluated in two weeks' time in light of any local developments and the latest advice of civil authorities and experts.

The priests of the Archdiocese will gratefully continue to offer Masses daily for the good of the faithful and for an end to this health crisis. While unable to attend in person, the faithful are encouraged to be spiritually united with the priest celebrants as they pray for the strengthening of this local Church. I am grateful that many parishes have already found ways to broadcast the Mass and other spiritual devotions online, over the radio, or on TV, allowing the faithful to be remotely present at Mass in these challenging times and to make a spiritual communion. Options for Mass and prayer resources may be found at archspm.org/covid19.

Moreover, in their inspiring desire to serve, the priests of the Archdiocese are committed during the next two weeks to continue exploring with the lay faithful possibilities for limited public celebrations of the Mass at the parish or at the Archdiocesan level that would respect the most up-to-date recommendations from the Department of

Health and allow us to continue to do our part to stop the spread of COVID-19/coronavirus in our community. Knowing that so many Catholics are deeply Eucharistic in their spirituality, our priests and deacons are also committed to expanding possibilities for adoration and private prayer, moving adoration, where necessary, to larger church spaces to facilitate appropriate social distancing.

I am grateful that confessions will continue to be heard at parishes, with appropriate precautions and adaptations taken in accordance with the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control. Priests will also continue to respond to sacramental emergencies and provide anointing and *Viaticum* to the extent this is possible. Please do not hesitate to contact your local parish to make them aware of any sacramental needs for the sick or the dying.

As we today mark a special day of fasting, abstinence and prayer invoking God's Providential care for our Archdiocese, our country and the world, I invite you to consider the upcoming "fast" from the Eucharist as a way to draw ever closer to our Lord, especially as we experience a more intense longing for Jesus, present in the Eucharist. During this time of Eucharistic fasting, I would encourage each of us to offer intercessory prayer each day for the health and safety of our community, especially healthcare workers, and to join in solidarity with the many Catholics throughout the world who regularly are unable to receive communion, due to persecution or to an absence of priests.

Please continue to pray for those who have died from COVID-19/coronavirus, those who mourn them, those who are sick and the many who care for them. I ask you to keep in your prayers, as well, Governor Tim Walz and Commissioner Jan Malcom from the Minnesota Department of Health, and all public servants working to keep our communities safe.

May Mary, Consoler of the Afflicted, keep us close to each other and to the loving heart of her son.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bernard A. Hebda".

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis