

## Diocese of Austin

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Office of the Bishop

April 3, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On March 17, 2020, I issued a decree suspending public Masses and other liturgies in the Diocese of Austin. Out of concern for the faithful of central Texas, today I issued a new decree suspending public Masses through April 30, 2020.

I hoped we might be able to publicly celebrate the Holy Week liturgies, but the current health situation compels me to continue the suspension. Making such a decision greatly pains me and my fellow priests. We join our Lord on the cross in a much different way this year, and we continue to place our hope in His Resurrection.

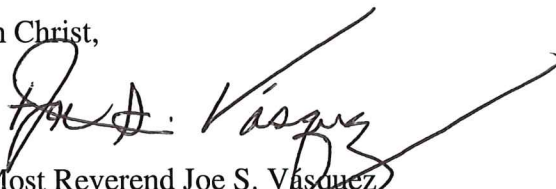
After I issued the decree on March 17, I distributed a letter offering specific instructions related to the decree. I restate, with modifications, those instructions below.

- Parishes will celebrate the Holy Week liturgies in accordance with the instructions I sent to priests on March 28, 2020 and should, if possible, make those liturgies available to the faithful via livestreaming.
- I have requested that our priests offer daily and Sunday Masses privately in the parish sanctuaries and encourage the parishes to make the Masses available through livestreaming on parish websites and social media. Priests and other ministers should follow the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and White House Coronavirus Task Force (WHCTF) recommendations in offering such Masses, which includes no more than ten people, including the priest, and maintaining proper social distancing.
- Parishes may continue day-to-day operations following the governor's executive order issued on March 31, 2020. Parishes should make accommodations for staff to work remotely, if possible.
- Parishes are encouraged to continue developing and using various ways of building spiritual community through social media.
- Confirmation Masses scheduled to occur while this decree is in effect will be rescheduled for a later date.
- Funerals, weddings, and baptisms may be celebrated privately, following the CDC and WHCTF recommendations of gathering no more than ten people, including the priest, and maintaining proper social distancing.

- If the church is open for any purpose, the parish must ensure that no gatherings larger than ten occur. Anyone visiting the church should follow the CDC and WHCTF recommendations of gathering with no more than ten people and maintaining proper social distancing.
- Confessions may be offered by appointment only and should follow the CDC and WHCTF recommendations and maintaining proper social distancing.
- Priests should remain available for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick by appointment only, following the CDC and WHCTF recommendations of maintaining proper social distancing. The priest should use his prudential judgment on methods of anointing, which have been provided in earlier communications.
- Because the governor's order restricts access to hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare facilities, priests, deacons, and other ministers may not engage in hospital, nursing home, or homebound ministry, but should be available if such facilities later permit such ministers to enter their facilities.
- Parish ministries may continue following the CDC and WHCTF recommendations. Pastors are asked to make prudential judgment in these matters.
- Religious education programs should follow the local school district closures and utilize remote formation alternatives.
- Catholic schools should follow the directives of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.
- Parishes may offer Eucharistic Adoration, being sure to follow the CDC and WHCTF recommendations of gathering no more than ten people, including the priest, and maintaining proper social distancing. Eucharistic Adoration should take place in a chapel or sanctuary large enough to maintain the CDC and WHCTF recommendations.

Please continue to pray for the strength to persevere by God's grace and mercy for ourselves and the entire world. May God bless all of us.

In Christ,



Most Reverend Joe S. Vasquez  
Bishop of Austin