



17 March 2020

To the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Fargo,

The current COVID-19 health crisis has led to extraordinary measures being taken throughout the world. As Catholics, we have a serious responsibility, not only in charity, but in justice, to prevent the spread of this disease to those who are most vulnerable.

As a result, I have made the difficult decision to cancel public celebrations of the Mass, sacraments, and parish events during this challenging time. The Sacraments of the Church were instituted by Christ for the sanctification of God's people. As a result, any restriction of their public celebration is a very serious matter. Nevertheless, we have the responsibility to protect the well-being of our brothers and sisters, and I judge these measures to be prudent and necessary. As our Lord taught, there is no commandment greater than to love God, and to love our neighbor as ourself (cf. Mk 12:30-31).

**Therefore, effective Noon, Wednesday, March 18, the following directives are to be observed throughout the Diocese of Fargo *until further notice*:**

- All public Masses are cancelled and the faithful within the territory of the Diocese of Fargo are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass for Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. The faithful are reminded that they are to observe other means of keeping the Lord's Day holy.
- Funeral rites may only be celebrated with 10 or fewer people. If it is pastorally beneficial, the Rite of Committal may be celebrated at the graveside, and a public funeral, with or without Mass, may be arranged at a later date. All other public funeral events are deferred.
- Weddings may only be celebrated with 10 or fewer people.
- The Baptism of infants is to be conferred only in the presence of 10 or fewer people.
- Confirmation/First Eucharist Masses are deferred.
- RCIA classes and sacramental initiation of adults are deferred. Exceptional cases may be referred to the Bishop's Liturgy Office.
- Individual Confession may be arranged with a local priest, while making appropriate arrangements that allow for both social distancing and confidentiality.
- Priests will continue to provide the sacraments on an individual basis, particularly in danger of death. Every effort will be made to provide Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum to those who need it. When needed, please contact your parish priest.

- All parish religious education classes are cancelled. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, have the opportunity and duty to take an active role in their children's religious education. The curriculum for youth religious education may be fulfilled by parents and students through the "Alive in Christ At Home Program" available at [www.fargodiocese.org/catechesis](http://www.fargodiocese.org/catechesis).
- All communal parish events, including receptions and outside events held in parish facilities are cancelled.
- Catholic schools are closed. Individual schools will make their own arrangements for on-line/in home instruction.
- Insofar as possible, priests are to continue saying Mass "privately" each day.
- Parishes that normally keep their churches open during the day are to retain this practice, if possible, so that individual members of the faithful may come for private prayer.

The faithful of our diocese have a great love for Christ and His Church. These prudent and necessary precautions are sure to be a hardship for us all. Each day I invite you to make an act of spiritual communion, pray the rosary, and engage in spiritual reading. This is especially important on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.


As members of the Body of Christ, even though separated by physical distance, we remain united in prayer and in the grace that continues to flow through the celebration of the sacraments of the Church. Let us together ask God, through the intercession of Mary and all the saints, for healing and divine assistance in this hour of need.

Finally, I ask all the faithful to pray for those who are ill and all others affected by COVID-19. I also take this opportunity to offer my paternal blessing to those working tirelessly in healthcare, emergency management, and other essential services. May the Lord be with us and our families.

Sincerely in Christ,

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† Most Rev. John T. Folda  
*Bishop of Fargo*

  
Very Rev. Andrew Jasinski  
*Chancellor*