



## Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana

### Office of the Bishop

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March 27, 2020

Dear Parish and Community Members,

These days bring news that requires our prayerful flexibility. We are experiencing events unknown to us before. But, if we take sacrificial short-term measures, long-term beneficial outcomes will start sooner. Know that I have consulted with the Indiana Catholic Bishops and my Presbyteral Council (PC) this week. I have consulted my own staff about liturgical options and recent communications from Vatican offices. Later in this letter, I will revise the directives on Sacraments that were included in our communications from March 17. It goes without saying that the directives with the most recent dates are the ones to be followed.

We are still early in this contagion and not certain about all the ways that COVID-19 is transmitted. As such, I am asking that our churches and chapels remain locked to visitors. The whole business of adequately disinfecting pews, door handles, and restrooms on a regular basis (which would have to be mandatory, assuming it is effective) would become more problematic as days and weeks wear on. We are still early in the public health efforts and today is only the third day of the stay-in-place two-week order. This week, Dr. Kristina Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, said that epidemiologists are predicting that the peak of the crisis in Indiana will arrive in mid-April in regions of the state already surging in cases, and the peak may arrive in the first two weeks in May for parts of our state that are just beginning to see a surge in cases.

Our Chrism Mass will be a smaller liturgy this year with a very select group of clergy and a couple of others. It will be livestreamed from the Cathedral at 11:00 AM EDT on Tuesday, April 7, 2020. We will share details and links as soon they are available.

I have received questions as to whether the COVID-19 epidemic in Indiana would affect the Uniting in Heart 2030 process. I remain committed to the mission and vision as it has been laid out. It is important to remember that the priest assignment or reassignment picture is just one part of Uniting in Heart. I remain committed to the assignment timetable. Uniting in Heart is about so much more than where individual priests are, it's about our diocese's future vibrancy and vitality.

Vibrant parishes have always relied heavily on lay leadership in the church, both among those in our employ as well as volunteers. It seems to me that it would be disrespectful and counterproductive to lose sight of our aspirations to be the People of God – we need each other when we come out on the other side of the health emergency. Priests and laity will have to prepare together to re-open operations and ministries. Pastoral teams are a strength, and these difficult days make clear why they are a godsend for our going forward.

During these past two weeks, it has been encouraging to hear priests describe how their staffs and leadership councils have worked to keep parishioners connected. Spiritual and temporal concerns

are being addressed. The use of phone trees and livestreaming and teleconferencing are tools familiar to people. The current crisis has benefitted us by the surge in connectivity.

**Revision of directives applying to Sacraments, as of March 27, 2020:**

1. Whenever possible, any already-scheduled sacramental celebrations should be postponed until further notice, especially noting Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Matrimony – this is in line with directives sent out for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.
2. Assume for now that April parish Confirmations for youth will be postponed.
3. We are following state guidelines regarding the visits to prisons. We are following hospital directives regarding their own campuses. These things are evolving.
4. General Absolution is not being granted at this time. Other communications are forthcoming about the love of God, sorrow for sin and firm purpose of amendment.
5. Nursing home visits and visits to the home-bound by parish laity should be canceled. This includes delivery of Holy Communion or of Palms related to Passion Sunday.
6. Individual confessions will not be scheduled until further notice. Sacramental Confession should be available to those in imminent danger of death who request it.

I appreciate your understanding and prayers during these unprecedented times. Please know how difficult this decision is for me and how much it hurts that we will not be able to gather as a community in the body of Christ for Holy Week and Easter. But, I must take these steps in the interests of the health of our parishioners and the broader community.

My prayers, support and solidarity are with all in the diocese. I am confident that if we are calm and trusting in the assured Providence of a very loving God, we will survive this severe crisis in good mind and spirit.

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he gave them and us the Lord's Prayer. It echoes truths about God and ourselves necessary for who we want to be now and when we emerge from the current crises.

In Christ's peace,



Most Reverend Timothy Doherty  
Bishop of Lafayette-in-Indiana