



## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



### Pastoral Letter

To All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious Men and Women, and Faithful Laity of the  
Diocese of Fort Worth

April 2, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I have written repetitively to you in my most recent pastoral letters, “it is incumbent upon us as faithful members of the Church to act with the utmost of solidarity, justice, and prudence in rejecting fear and embracing our responsibility to love our neighbor, especially the vulnerable, for the sake of peace and the common good of our society.” The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the gift of Faith that God has given us in the salvation won for us by His only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Whenever a priest offers the sacrifice of the Mass with the people gathered in assembly; whenever he absolves sinners in confession; whenever he anoints the dying; we worship God and the Church offers an essential service for the happiness and flourishing of the human person and also for the common good of society. Human beings are integrally composed of soul and body and the Church is called to care for each and both.

Thus, it is with gratitude that I learned of Governor Abbott’s executive order of March 30, 2020 and of its explanation by Attorney General Paxton on March 31, 2020 recognizing that religious worship services are essential for the common good. I am grateful for this legal support for our First Amendment right of freedom of religion, a right given to us only by God and recognized by the State. I am further grateful for the continued cooperation and respectful dialogue for this essential service among our religious leaders and county and city officials throughout the 28 counties of the Diocese of Fort Worth. This cooperation and dialogue preceded the Governor’s executive order and continues currently for the sake of the common good.

With every right there are corresponding responsibilities on the part of those who enjoy rights. Public health and government officials at every level have counseled all of us as a nation that the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to stay at home especially during these next two weeks in order to prevent its further spread especially among the elderly and chronically ill who are most threatened by it. As Catholics, we each have a responsibility to join with all men and women of every faith and those of good will to do our part in helping in this fight against the pandemic. It is a civic responsibility and an obligation of charity for us to do so.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

It is precisely in this exercise of our right to religious freedom that I direct our priests and faithful to maintain the policy that was set forth in my pastoral letter to you on March 24, 2020. I am asking that Mass continue to be celebrated without a congregation present and that no gatherings be held for scheduled confessions or other services. Emergencies and ministry to the dying requiring the anointing of the sick must continue in accord with safety protocols and on a contingency basis. The most recent contingent practice of distributing Holy Communion after Mass must not be reinstated at this time.

I am asking the pastors of our parishes to work with our deacons and lay leaders to devise the logistics for the safe and prudent distribution of Holy Communion and the safe administration of the Sacrament of Penance after this crisis passes and we begin our way forward to a gradual and more normal practice of our faith.

It is my hope and prayer that we would be able to institute such practices safely beginning, **Sunday, April 19, 2020**, the Sunday of the Octave of Easter---known also as the Sunday of Divine Mercy. This date is contingent upon future consideration of the risks involved to public health and especially to the transmission of this virus to the elderly and chronically ill. Please join with me in prayer that this pandemic will come to pass in God's Providence and through His loving mercy.

Thank you for your patient understanding and for your continued examination of the doctrine that the Eucharist is a gift to be received from God with gratitude and not a matter of convenience nor of our own human initiative. Please remember me in your prayers along with our priests and deacons who are serving in these currently adverse circumstances. Be assured of my affectionate remembrance of each of you in my prayers. I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

*+ Michael F. Olson*

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA  
Bishop of Fort Worth

*E. James Hart*

Reverend Msgr. E. James Hart  
Chancellor

