



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 17, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I stated to you in my last pastoral letter, it was my sincere hope that we could return to some form of public masses and regularly scheduled confessions by April 19, 2020, the Second Sunday of Easter, Mercy Sunday. It is my ardent desire and that of each of our priests serving in the Diocese of Fort Worth to celebrate Mass with a full assembly of the faithful gathered to worship God in sacrifice and sacrament as Christ intends. It is an authentic desire of mine and that of our priests to celebrate the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in accord with a regular schedule. While civic officials have told us that staying at home and social distancing are having a positive effect on slowing the virus and preventing its spread, serious health threats still exist. After consultation with civic officials and our pastors I have judged that this weekend is premature for us to return to the public celebration of Sunday Mass and regularly scheduled confessions.

Now is the time for us to prepare more intentionally for our return to the public celebration of Mass with distribution of Holy Communion in various parts of the Diocese of Fort Worth throughout the month of May. Please know that this will require preparation and patience by each of us to return in a safe, gradual, incremental, regional, and ordered manner in tandem with the return to business in our society throughout the distinct twenty-eight counties of our Diocese of Fort Worth. I am asking for your full and collaborative participation for us to accomplish this in our shared vocation as the Church. There are several things that we can do now to facilitate this endeavor.

First, I encourage the elderly and those most vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 to stay at home and also to **contact your local parish** (by phone, text, or email) to make your parish aware that you are doing your part by staying at home and praying. This will help us to belong to each other as the Church and to provide for your pastoral and sacramental needs (including anointing of the sick) in the extraordinary circumstances of this pandemic. Please contact your local parish during the coming weeks.

Secondly, when we return to the public celebration of Mass with distribution of Holy Communion it is imperative that each person who attends do so **wearing a cloth face mask** as

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has been strongly recommended by our public officials. If you do not have one, please acquire a mask or face covering for you to wear when we return to the public celebration of Mass and distribution of Holy Communion. This is important to prevent each of us from spreading the virus just as much to prevent us from catching it. We must safeguard the vulnerable. Social distancing and all hygienic practices must be maintained for the immediate future.

Thirdly, if you are able, please don't forget to maintain your stewardship and to support your parish financially, through direct giving or the mail.

Finally, and most importantly, **please donate non-perishable food items and gift cards** to your local parish that they can be distributed through food banks and other outreach services in our parishes and local communities. Please remember Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) as the ordinary means of delivery for care and services to the poor and those who are most in need. There will be an ongoing and growing need throughout our path to recovery.

Please remember that we are walking together on a challenging path to recovery as sons and daughters of the Resurrection. Our goal as the Church is the love of God and neighbor and not simply a return to the past as to what has been deemed as "normal," if by "normal" we mean a spirit of individualism insensitive and unaware of the needs of others. With God's Grace, we are more than able to accomplish this. Please continue to pray for those most affected by the COVID-19 virus. Pray for the women and men who serve our community in government, in police and firefighting, in hospitals and nursing homes, in our military, in our food preparation and delivery services, for our priests and deacons, and for the poor and those most in need.

As plans develop for our return to the public celebration of Mass and sacraments in the coming days and weeks, please consult the diocesan and parish websites for further communications. With every good wish and prayers for you, I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



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



The Reverend Msgr. E. James Hart
Chancellor

