



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO
Renew Faith • Build Communion • Inspire Hope
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 15, 2020
Third Sunday of Lent

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we hear St. Paul remind us in today's Second Reading in his Letter to the Romans: *"Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us."* (Rom.5:5) I believe we would all agree that we are living in some very unsettling times, and there are many reasons why we, along with people around the world, are experiencing fear and concern due to the growing pandemic being caused by COVID 19, also known as the "Coronavirus". In spite of this, we need to take comfort in the fact that, as People of Faith, we place our trust in our Loving Father God, and in His Son Jesus Christ, Who is our Hope and our Consolation.

During this current health crisis, I write to assure you of my ongoing prayers for you, and to encourage all of us to pray for and with one another. In particular, we pray for all those who are suffering from the Coronavirus, for all our health care workers, for all our civic leaders, and, in a special way, for those who are at special risk. It is very important that we can take all the precautions necessary to stem the spread of this virus, and to allow our excellent health care systems to be able to keep up with the needs as they arise. All of us need to use common sense, to follow all the directives for our own personal hygiene, and to adhere to the guidelines that we have already offered for ways to make sure that the public celebrations of our Holy Masses can be done with a high degree of safety and protection for all who participate.

With this Letter, I am granting a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for those who feel they are at risk and need to stay home. All regularly scheduled Masses will be celebrated for those who are able to participate. We encourage those who are healthy and able to continue to avail yourselves of the essential graces these Sacraments provide.

The celebration of the Sacraments, including the Sacraments of Penance, Baptism, Anointing of the Sick, and Marriages, as well as funerals and Eucharistic Adoration, certainly should continue, but following the Guidelines already referenced.

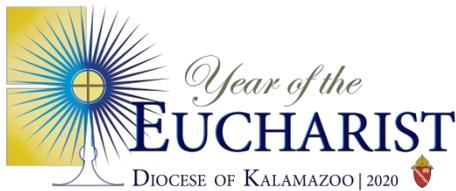
We have taken a number of other proactive steps as well. I have already suspended all Parish Collaborative Visits that were scheduled during these weeks of Lent; they will be rescheduled at a later date. We will assess the situation further as we proceed for the Visits that are scheduled after Easter. In addition, all Diocesan-sponsored events during this time are also being cancelled or rescheduled. Any large parish gatherings should be rescheduled, and I ask every Pastor to consider rescheduling other non-essential parish activities.

While we must all take the necessary precautions, it is also important to remember that we can never be relieved of our obligation to maintain our Faith through regular and vibrant prayer life. We also need to be mindful of our fellow parishioners who may have special needs, especially those who may live alone, or those who have serious problems related to child care, since the schools will be closed. This should be the time when we are particularly mindful of and encouraging to one another in ways that we can reach out in charity, offering assistance, and urging our parishioners to provide that “helping hand” wherever there are needs.

We will continue to monitor the situation and modify our response as needed. These are truly uncharted circumstances we are facing, and this is a Lenten Season like most of us have never before experienced. Whatever the circumstances around us, Lent remains for us a time to repent and believe. Let us pray for one another, and for God’s graces to keep us moving forward in our journey of Faith – through these times of distress, fears, and suffering – knowing that Jesus leads us always to the Cross, the sign of Victory over sin and death, and into the Joy of the new life of Easter.

Assuring you of my prayers for you and your families, and asking God’s blessings upon all of us in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, I remain,

Faithfully yours in Christ,



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+ Paul J. Bradley

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Prayer to the Virgin Mary for Protection

O Mary,
you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

~Pope Francis' prayer of March 11 at a special Mass asking Mary to protect the world during the coronavirus pandemic.