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To all priests, deacons and parishioners of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie

Re: COVID-19 – New Pastoral Directives

Dear brother priests and deacons, dear parishioners,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, with rapid daily changes. I urge you to follow all guidelines and directives provided by our governments and our public health authorities. This situation compels us to make difficult but necessary pastoral decisions, in line with government orders and directives and in solidarity with all Canadians, in a serious attempt to slow down the spread of this threatening disease.

Effective immediately, the following new pastoral practices must be applied throughout the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie.

I. SUNDAY AND WEEKDAY LITURGIES, CHRISM MASS, HOLY WEEK, FUNERALS

1. *Regular Masses*

- All Sunday and weekly public Masses remain cancelled until further notice. I grant all the faithful of the Diocese a dispensation from their Sunday and Holy Days obligations.
- Churches will be available for individual private time, at regular Mass hours.
- On our website, we will also post a series of links where you can access live daily Mass.
- The priests of the Diocese will celebrate Mass every day privately, for the intentions of parishioners, for people who are directly and indirectly affected by the virus, as well as for our health care professionals and facilities.

2. ***Holy Week liturgies*** are cancelled. We will inform you of live streamed liturgies for Holy Week in the near future.

3. *The Mass of Chrism* scheduled for March 31st in Sault Ste. Marie is cancelled. I will celebrate Mass privately at the Diocesan Center chapel, along with the Chairs of the Pastoral Regions. Following the Chrism Mass, the oils for the celebration of sacraments will be made available at the regional level.

4. *Funerals*

During this emergency, there will be no vigils, no wake services nor funeral Masses at the church. We encourage that a prayer service take place at the Funeral Home, whenever possible, according to their protocols established during this crisis. A rite of Committal may be celebrated at the cemetery with immediate family members present, respecting always the federal and provincial regulations. Masses may be celebrated at a later date, once the crisis is over.

II. SACRAMENTS

1. **Baptism**

Communal celebrations of Baptism are not allowed. Individual Baptism is allowed with immediate family only and following the regulations established by health authorities.

2. **RCIA**

I dispense the catechumens from the scrutinies. Celebration of sacraments and reception in the Church will be postponed.

3. **First Holy Communion, First Reconciliation and Confirmation**

These sacraments will be postponed for the duration of the COVID-19 epidemic. This includes cessation of all meetings for sacramental preparation.

4. **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are not allowed at this time. All those who wish to receive the sacrament should contact a priest. The sacrament is to be celebrated, not in a confessional but rather in another location where confidentiality may be ensured and where the distance required by health officials can be maintained.

5. **Marriage**

Marriages without Mass may take place with the immediate family members, provided they follow the regulations established by health authorities. The setting of dates for new marriage celebrations should be postponed.

6. Marriage Preparation

Group marriage preparation classes are cancelled. Online marriage preparation programs can be found on our website at www.dioceseofsaultstemarie.org. Pastors are to ensure that individual couples are properly prepared for marriage.

III. VISITS TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

These visits should be discontinued during this crisis to avoid spreading the virus. In the spirit of community, I invite you to contact the sick by phone or other electronic means to see how they are doing, to pray with them and offer moral support.

IV. VISITS TO THE CRITICALLY ILL AND DYING

Visits to critically ill and dying should continue as much as possible but only if precautionary measures are respected. See addendum: "*Clergy Directives for Critically Ill and Dying in Healthcare Facilities and Homes*".

V. MEETINGS AND GATHERINGS

All non-essential parish meetings, gatherings of outside groups, educational seminars, retreats and social events are cancelled until further notice.

STAY STRONG AND UNITED IN PRAYER

We will review our emergency provisions regularly in accord with the requirements of the public health officials and we will provide updates at : <https://dioceseofsaultstemarie.org/covid-19>

Let us pray fervently for the sick, the lonely and distraught; for the dead and families grieving their loss; for the healthcare providers, government and civil authorities and the volunteers helping their neighbors. Let us be Good Samaritans toward those in need of help.

On this Feast day of Saint Joseph, principal patron of Canada, Hope of the Sick and patron of the dying, and Solace of the afflicted, pray that he may intercede for us.

United in prayer,



+Marcel Damphousse
Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie