



CATHOLIC 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

March 18, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I wrote 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 Eucharist is what unites us together with the Church triumphant in heaven, the Church militant, and the Church suffering.

After consultation with my priests and civic officials at local and state levels, and in cooperating with them for the good of society, I am informing you that Mass will continue to be celebrated at the scheduled times throughout the territory of the Diocese of Fort Worth, but without a congregation physically present in the church. This will begin tomorrow, March 19, 2020. I am asking that priests celebrate these Masses assisted by a deacon and server/acolyte for the published intention at the scheduled time in the main sanctuary of the parish church. Holy Communion will then be distributed outside of church in designated spaces after Mass for those who are present in their cars or separated by a safe distance. It is to be distributed in an open space with safe social distancing, in the hand, and not through a car window. If inclement weather prohibits this, Holy Communion may be distributed in the church with safe social distancing and without crowding with due respect for the limits on gathering size. Because of the extraordinary circumstances in which we are called to minister, I am requiring that Holy Communion be received in the hand to prevent the spread of contagion. Wherever possible, I am asking that parish Masses be livestreamed on websites and Facebook.

I am asking that my priests and deacons over the age of 60 refrain from distributing Holy Communion for the sake of their health. They are free to exercise their own good judgment in this regard. Likewise, people over the age of 60 are encouraged to minimize contact as much as possible for the sake of their health. Extraordinary ministers of Communion should be enlisted from confirmed, faithful and healthy people between the ages of 18 and 59. The circumstances current in our community are such that attendance at Mass borders on an impossibility and thus there is no obligation to attend.

I am further directing our priests to open our churches for published and scheduled periods for

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individual adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament and prayer with scheduled opportunities for Confession behind the screen. Social distancing protocols must be enforced. Prayers should include for the intention of our nation's safety and the healing of the sick. Anointing of the sick should be administered with a cotton stock and not the bare thumb. The cotton stock is to be burned afterwards. Priests should avail themselves for the celebration of the sacraments with due regard for safeguarding everyone's health.

I am asking our pastors and all our Catholic leaders to cooperate with local food banks and Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) and to offer our buildings for locations to provide drive-through delivery service of food for those who are quarantined or who will suffer economic hardship because of the current circumstances. Efforts should be made in like fashion for the distribution of the Holy Eucharist to those who are sick and deprived for any reason of Holy Communion in ordinary circumstances. More norms will follow as our situation changes.

Please make every effort to remain in communication with each other. Make your parish aware of shut-ins and quarantined people for the future delivery of supplies, pastoral, and spiritual care. Do not hoard resources nor engage in price gouging; to do so is evil. Remain hopeful and love your neighbor. Please remain faithful and generous in your stewardship for your parish's well-being, including the use of online giving.

Let us pray for each other and for the gifts of fortitude and wisdom to persevere through these challenging times. God is always present and will never abandon us. With every good wish for you and for the peace of our nation I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Olson".

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