

March 18, 2020

To the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Bismarck,

The most serious health crisis we are now experiencing, the COVID-19 virus has required unprecedented measures be taken by our national, state and local governments and, as devout Catholics and responsible citizens, we all have a share in this responsibility not to spread this virus, but to do all we can reasonably do to stop its spread and to pray and work for its end. As Catholics this is our moral responsibility in justice and in charity.

Thus, after long hours of prayer and consultation, I must make the hard decision to cancel all public celebrations of the Mass, the sacraments and devotions until further notice that it is safe for us to gather again for public worship. This is a great sorrow for me as your Bishop but, in justice and charity to you and to all in our diocese, I make this decision.

Thus, the following directives are to be observed in the Diocese of Bismarck and may not be changed or modified by anyone but the Diocesan Bishop:

Effective Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. and until further notice, all daily and Sunday Masses are cancelled in the Diocese of Bismarck. This applies to all parishes, oratories, and chapels used for public worship. The Catholic faithful within the territory of the Diocese of Bismarck are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.

Confirmation - As a result, all of the scheduled celebrations of the sacrament of confirmation between Sunday, March 22, 2020 through Sunday, May 17, 2020, are cancelled and will be rescheduled for the fall between September and December 2020.

Communal Penance Services - All Communal Penance Services are cancelled. All parish priests are to keep the regular schedule of confessions in their parishes but both priest and penitent are to use a screen for the celebration of the sacrament until further notice.

Weddings - All weddings already scheduled may take place but are to be limited to the bride and groom, the two witnesses, the parents of the bride and groom and the priest or deacon who is to witness the marriage. The Church's Rite of Matrimony Within or Outside of Mass may be used.

Funerals - All funerals are to be private not public, that is to say, for the immediate family only and for the priest or deacon who is the celebrant. The Rite of Christian Funerals Within or Outside of Mass may be used. There is to be no wake and/or vigil observed the day before or day of the funeral. No luncheon or dinner is permitted in the church hall after the funeral.

Baptism - Infant baptism may be administered but may have only 10 persons including the priest or deacon present. All RCIA classes are cancelled. The sacramental initiation of adults by a Profession of Faith or by baptism may take place at the discretion of the priest but must be done individually and with no more than 10 persons present.

Religious Education - All parish religious education classes are cancelled until further notice. Our Catholic schools are following the directives of the State and will remain closed until such time as it is deemed safe to reopen. Parents are asked to follow the directions given by their local Catholic schools.

Televised/Livestream Mass - All pastors of parishes with the capability to livestream are to offer one daily and one Sunday Mass without a congregation or other ministers present and have that available for their parishioners on the parish website. If any parish does not have this capability, the parishioners may go to the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit website and view daily and Sunday Mass from there (as available). As always, the televised Mass is available on the FOX TV affiliate in your viewing area on Sundays at 10 a.m. and 11:30 p.m. Please check the diocesan website and social media for updates and more details about livestream Masses.

Chrism Mass - The Mass of Chrism will be celebrated without a congregation present on Monday, April 6, 2020, at 11:00 a.m. CDT from the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and this will be able to be viewed on the diocesan website. In order to protect our priests, there will be no general concelebration of this Mass, but our priests are asked to participate in the Renewal of their Ordination Promises via live stream.

Priests will be expected to offer Holy Mass privately every day if possible and to be available to provide the anointing of the sick and viaticum to all the Catholic faithful. Please call your parish office with any special sacramental and spiritual need. Each Parish is to keep its Church open during the day for the benefit of those who wish to pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

What all of us must do in these days is not lose hope in the merciful goodness of Almighty God. Even though we will not be physically close to one another at this time, by our fervent and humble prayer for each other and all who are ill and affected, we remain united in the powerful Communion of Saints. Let us continue to beg Our Mother of Perpetual Help and Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Holy Family and Patron of the Universal Church, to assist us in our time of need by their powerful intercession.

I offer to all of you my daily prayers and my blessing. Let us accompany one another and everyone on this holy journey of healing and purification.

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

Mr. Dale Eberle
Chancellor