



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Letter of Most Rev. Michael J. Hoeppner, Bishop of Crookston Regarding COVID-19 Developments and Holy Week March 26, 2020

Dear Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Crookston,

“The Lord is our help and our shield. In him do our hearts find joy. We trust in his holy name.” (Ps. 33) We continue to experience inconveniences and disruptions in our daily lives due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, including now for the next two weeks, a “stay at home” order restricting our out-of-the-home activities to what is essentially necessary. As the Catholic community here, we must do our part to try to slow down the spread of this virus and do all that we can to minimize the risk to ourselves and others. We do so firmly, holding to our faith that God indeed is our help and shield and placing our trust in him.

Governor Walz’s “stay at home” order allows clergy and some staff the freedom of movement to minister to the faithful “wherever their services are needed.” Although gatherings of over 10 people are not to be held, church buildings can be left open when possible to accommodate essential pastoral care, while maintaining proper precautions such as “social distancing.” In bringing the sacraments to those in serious need, priests will have to coordinate with hospital and medical professionals.

Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death; rising he restored our life. Therefore, the Easter Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord is the culmination of the entire liturgical year. “The celebration of these days is of utmost importance in the spiritual and pastoral life of the Church” (*Ceremonial of Bishops*). While it may not be possible to join together in our church buildings for the celebration of these days, it is possible for us to join together in spirit to give glory to God and to receive God’s manifold blessings as we celebrate the Triduum this year. With an eye to our joining together in spirit for this celebration this year, I want to share information recently received from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (I), as well as information recently received from the Apostolic Penitentiary (II).

I. Chrism Mass Postponed: The Congregation for Divine Worship has reminded us that the celebration of the Triduum is unique and “must be celebrated in the following way.” The liturgical celebrations of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter cannot be transferred to or celebrated on any other day than the day set by the Church. This is not the case for the celebration of the Chrism Mass. The Diocesan Bishop has the faculty to postpone it. Because large gatherings are not allowed at this time, I am postponing the celebration of the Chrism Mass this year to a date yet to be determined. Priests are to continue to use the oils they are currently using. Remember, the Church provides for an *ad hoc* blessing of the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens as necessary.

The Triduum: Priests are granted the faculty to celebrate the liturgical mysteries of the Paschal Triduum in their parish churches without the physical participation of the faithful. 1) The faithful should be informed of the times of the celebrations so they can prayerfully unite themselves in their homes. 2) The use of *live* television broadcasts and/or *live* internet broadcasts is encouraged; “live” due to the need for both the priest celebrating and the people spiritually joining in to respect the proper time/day of each celebration. This means that these celebrations cannot be shown at other times. Again, only a minimal number of ministers and helpers should be involved.

Holy Thursday: The faculty to celebrate Mass on this day in a suitable place without the people is granted in an exceptional manner to all priests. 1) The washing of the feet is to be omitted. 2) At the end of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is kept in the tabernacle. 3) Priests unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray Vespers of the day.

Good Friday: In their parish churches, in the manner possible, priests will celebrate the Passion of the Lord. 1) In the Universal Prayer, there is to be included a special intention for the sick, those who have died, for those who feel dismayed or disheartened, and for all health workers.

The Easter Vigil: Priests are to celebrate the Easter Vigil if possible. The celebration is to be in the parish church. 1) The preparation of the Fire and the procession is omitted. 2) The Paschal Candle is lit and the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) follows. The Liturgy of the Word takes place. 3) For the “Baptismal Liturgy” the “Renewal of Baptismal Promises” alone is necessary. The Liturgy of the Eucharist follows. 4) Priests who have absolutely no possibility of uniting themselves to the Paschal Vigil celebrated in a church should pray the Office of Readings for Easter Sunday. The celebration of the Easter sacraments for catechumens and candidates can be postponed if necessary.

II. The Sacrament of Penance: I do hope you have been able to receive the Sacrament of Penance this Lent. Unfortunately, we have not been able to hold the usual Communal Penance Services. However, opportunities for individual celebration of this Sacrament can still be made available where proper precautions can be followed, e.g. “social distancing.” As we deal with COVID-19, The Apostolic Penitentiary reminds us of what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says about the forgiveness of sins for those confronted with an impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution. “...it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, ... expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by... the firm resolve to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even moral ones” (CCC, no. 1452). Perfect contrition requires: the love of God, the sincere desire for forgiveness, the ardent commitment to receive the Sacrament of Penance when it is available.

Also, from the Apostolic Penitentiary, a Plenary Indulgence “is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, those subject to quarantine, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them... if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other

forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfill the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intention, when it is possible)."

I want to thank all our priests and all the lay faithful who are generously working these days to provide spiritual nourishment to God's People here. Even though we are not able to gather in our parish churches, we look forward to our celebration of this year's Triduum. I will celebrate at our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and these liturgies will be live-streamed. I invite you to join me at: www.facebook.com/diocrookston:

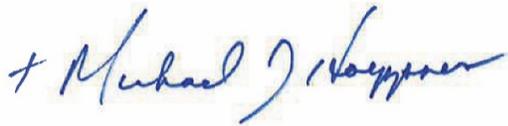
Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, 7:00 p.m., April 9, 2020.

Friday of the Passion of the Lord, 3:00 p.m., April 10, 2020.

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, 8:30 p.m., April 11, 2020.

I encourage you and each and every household to set aside the time and to make the effort to prayerfully join in the unique and grace-filled days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. God bless you. We remain united as the Body of Christ in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. May our prayers join with all the saints on earth and those in heaven to give fitting glory to God. "The Lord is our help and our shield. In him do our hearts find joy." A truly joyous and blessed Easter to you all.

Sincerely, in the name of the Lord Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael J. Hoepfner". The signature is written in a cursive style and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Rev. Michael J. Hoepfner
Bishop of Crookston