



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

March 16, 2020

Dear Diocesan Family,

Peace be with you! I write to you at this time of national and worldwide emergency to encourage you in your own personal prayer, fasting, and charitable works as we enter more deeply into our Lenten journey in ways we never expected.

Today, I announce that due to the Coronavirus and its relentless spread and effect on the most vulnerable of our society, all public gatherings for Mass, prayer, Faith Formation, and certain parish activities (see list) are suspended effective immediately. It is my hope and prayer that I will be able to lift this suspension in time for Holy Week and Easter, but that will have to be a decision for a later date. Correspondingly, during this time period the faithful are dispensed from their Sunday obligation to participate in Holy Mass.

This decision is not an easy one. For 57 years of my own life, Sunday Mass and Daily Mass during Lent have been a staple for me. Never did I think or ever imagine I would have to ask people not to gather for the Holy Eucharist. Nonetheless, I recognize my own obligation to ensure the health of the faithful, including our clergy, both spiritually and physically. By implementing effective social distancing measures, the Diocese of Syracuse supports the common good of all citizens and prioritizes the dignity of every human life, especially those most susceptible to the virus at this time.

I know that some of the Catholic faithful will be saddened and even upset by the decision to cancel Masses. This decision is based on the recommendations from both local and national emergency management and public health agencies and the immediate need to halt the spread of the Coronavirus. My hope is that this restriction of the public celebration of the Mass will be for a very limited period.

For the time being, it is necessary to keep in mind the common good of public health and the importance of doing our part in preventing the spread of the coronavirus by avoiding large gatherings (which operative number according to the Center for Disease Control is 50). My Daily Mass will be livestreamed on the Internet and we are looking to provide also the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic Adoration, and a Lenten Retreat by such means.

As Catholics, caring for our spiritual and sacramental lives is paramount. Therefore, priests (physical health and age permitting) are available for sacramental emergencies and pastoral appointments while maintaining the necessary public health precautions.

At the pastor's discretion, churches may remain open for personal prayer, but public devotions such as the Stations of the Cross or other prayer services should be suspended to avoid large gatherings. Instead, I encourage you to make these devotions in private; the Diocesan website will provide resources to facilitate such prayer. If a parish already has regularly scheduled or perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament,

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it should take place in a larger space (for example, the main church instead of a chapel) where sufficient social distancing (the CDC recommends at least 6 feet) is possible. If a church is open, pastors are to ensure that there is a thorough daily cleaning of all surfaces and that social distancing is maintained.

A particular concern are weddings and funerals. These may proceed but attendance should be limited to immediate family. Likewise, baptisms already scheduled may proceed but attendance should likewise be limited and fresh water be used for each baptism. Of course, in the case of emergency, baptism should always be conferred. Please also maintain social distancing for these events as described in the above paragraph. The individual reception of the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) may continue to be offered, but we have asked priests to move to a larger room/space for greater distance between priest and penitent and the use of a screen to block airflow between priest and penitent.

In pastoral care of the sick, please assist the priests in their effort to follow all protocols recommended by health professionals. In the event that a priest is asked to anoint someone with the coronavirus, the Code of Canon Law permits the use of an instrument (CIC 1000 §2), for example, a cotton swab. In such case, the used instrument should not come in contact again with the oil stock and should be disposed of in a reverent manner. In case of necessity, a single anointing on the forehead or on any other part of the body with the entire sacramental form ("Through this holy anointing... May the Lord who frees you from sin...") suffices (CIC 1000 §1; PCS, 23).

With the temporary suspension of Sunday Mass, the public celebration of the RCIA scrutinies are also suspended. The Office of Worship will provide further guidance and any adaptations for the Easter celebration of the Sacraments will be addressed in future correspondence.

With public masses being cancelled, there will likely be financial and operational impacts to your parish. Parishioners can help their parish out by mailing their offering or by online contributions. I have also decided to postpone the start of the Annual Hope Appeal until we have a better grasp of the economic impact that this national emergency will have on the families of our diocese.

At the pastor's discretion, parish offices may remain open with essential staff. If your parish offices are open, be assured that regular cleaning of the office space will occur and appropriate social distancing should be observed.

Many people's lives are being disrupted by the Coronavirus and our attempts to stop its rapid spread. In this season of Lent, let us increase our prayers, fasting and charitable works, so that God's great compassion and love may be a source of hope and consolation for all. Please check in on your neighbor, especially the elderly and those who may be isolated in any way.

Please check our diocesan website for updates and further guidance. Let us keep each other – and all those impacted – in prayer during this time. Know I will remember you at Mass and in my daily prayer. May God watch over and bless each member of our Diocesan Family!

In Christ our Hope,



Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse