



Diocese of Peoria

**Office of the Vicar General
Spalding Pastoral Center
419 N.E. Madison Avenue
Peoria, Illinois 61603**

309-671-1550

13 March 2020

Dear Monsignors and Fathers,

The Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass begins, "In you, O Lord, I put my trust, let me never be put to shame." At all times – but especially now – we place our trust in God. I suspect that we shall remember these times for the rest of our lives. We are trying to act with prudence and appropriate caution at this difficult moment in history.

As I reflect upon these things, I cannot help but have before my mind our great heroes such as St. Charles Borromeo who personally cared for victims of the plague in Milan in the 1500s. Yet I cannot ignore the fact that in our day, we understand disease transmission much more clearly than in previous centuries and it is clear to us today that people can be carriers of a disease without knowing it.

Our motivation in all of the recent directives and those that will be forthcoming is to take prudent steps to *break the chain of transmission* of the contagion. No solution is foolproof or airtight. But during the influenza epidemic of 1918 that infected a quarter of the population of the US, and that killed hundreds of thousands of people, some cities such as Saint Louis took measures that seemed drastic at the time but translated into having a per capita death rate much lower than other large cities. We realize that our decisions regarding sacred worship will greatly disturb people's lives. Nevertheless our efforts are aimed at protecting those entrusted to our care – especially the most vulnerable among us, such as the elderly and those who are in delicate or compromised health.

Hospitals have protocols in place for attending to those with the Coronavirus, including the pastoral care that will be offered. But the day may come when those stricken by this deadly virus will be in their homes because hospital beds will be full. As I indicated at our gathering yesterday, we may have to train some of our priests who are not already trained hospital chaplains to minister directly to those who are confined to their homes.

So with all of that having been said, I am sending to you the directives that come with this mailing. Additional ones will surely follow. We are all in this together, as brother priests to one another and as spiritual fathers to the people we serve. We are in God's hands, brothers. We call upon his mercy and beg the intercession of Our Lady, who is also the Mother of Mercy, the Health of the Sick, and the Comforter of the Afflicted.

With my sincere best wishes and the promise of my prayers, I remain,

Sincerely in the Lord,

Monsignor Philip D. Halfacre
Vicar General

Directives regarding the celebration of the Mass and the administration of the Sacraments

13 March 2020

UPDATED: 17 March 2020, 7:00PM

These directives are intended to accompany the letter of Bishop Jenky issued today.

All of these directives remain in effect until further notice.

They are in effect for the Diocese of Peoria and can be dispensed only for the gravest of reasons and by the Bishop or the Vicar General.

The celebration of Holy Mass

- Masses are suspended beginning with the evening Mass on 14 March.
- Specifically, it is the Mass *coram populo* (in the presence of the people) that is suspended.
- Priests are *very much encouraged* to continue offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. One or two servers may be present.

Funerals

- We will not be celebrating funerals during this period though we will bury the dead.
- It is permitted to perform the Rite of Committal outdoors – not in a chapel – at the graveside.
- At a mausoleum, the cleric and the faithful are all to remain outdoors.
- The suspension extends as well to the Funeral Liturgy Outside of Mass that is often done at the funeral home.
- Naturally, we encourage the celebration of a memorial Mass once the suspension is lifted.

Weddings

- During this time, priests may witness a marriage with only the five canonically required persons being present. Namely, the bride and groom, the priest, and two witnesses.

Baptisms

- Baptisms may take place, but only with the parents, godparents, and the one being baptized being present.
- They should be limited to one family at a time rather than multiple families as is often the case in large parishes.

Confirmation

- Contrary to an earlier communication, except for those who wish to be confirmed who are in danger of death, the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation is suspended.

Anointing of the Sick

- Priests, using the greatest prudence, may continue to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.
- It is of greatest importance that priests be diligent about not contaminating their oil stock by reinserting their thumb without first thoroughly washing their hands.
- In the case of those who are known to have the Coronavirus, further directives should be sought from the Vicar General or the Episcopal Vicar for Healthcare.

Holy Communion to the Sick

- The widespread practice of having Holy Communion brought to the sick by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is suspended – except in the cases where it is occasionally done by a member of the immediate family.
- Priests and Deacons may bring Holy Communion to the sick, exercising the greatest prudence when doing so.
- In the case of those who are known to have the Coronavirus, further directives should be sought from the Vicar General or the Episcopal Vicar for Healthcare.

Confession/Reconciliation

- Priests may continue to hear confessions.
- Confessions are not to be heard in a confessional box, but in a way that permits a safe distance between the priest and penitent. See the directive below on the keeping of our churches open.
- Times for confessions could be scheduled and posted.

Keeping Churches Open

- During this difficult time, Pastors are encouraged to have times during the day when their churches are open to the public so that they may take comfort and solace in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Priests are encouraged to offer Confessions at some point during these times.
- Mindful that we are making every attempt to avoid gatherings of people, we are suspending public devotions during this time.
- In places where Perpetual Adoration is held, chapels may remain open for the present but the Pastor must be vigilant in not permitting Our Lord to be unattended.
- Having hand sanitizer available for those who enter our churches is strongly advised.
- As was previous directed, all holy water fonts are to be emptied.

Parish events and activities

- Parish events and activities of any kind are suspended.

Parish Offices

- Parish offices should operate on a limited basis with only essential staff present.
- The presence of volunteers is strongly discouraged during this time.
- A system should be in place to retrieve phone messages.