

March 16, 2020

To the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of St Paul in Alberta,

The spread of COVID-19 in our province and around the world is a serious challenge to all of us. Especially at a time like this, we must strive to care for the spiritual, physical, and mental health and well-being of our fellow parishioners and citizens. To undertake this, we rely upon our expert medical professionals to furnish us with up-to-date and accurate information, and to guide and protect all of us with the directives they provide.

I have full confidence in the direction given to our province by the Chief Medical Officer. And until late Sunday afternoon, an exemption from the ban on public gatherings of more than 250 people was granted to places of worship. In yesterday's communique, that exemption was removed. It is now clearly a public health requirement that liturgical gatherings in excess of 250 people not take place. A further prohibition is placed upon gatherings in excess of fifty people where it is anticipated that groups considered at high-risk, such as seniors, will be present.

To ask parishes to limit the number of parishioners coming for Mass to the number of 250 or even 50 would not be practical. In addition, weekday Masses, Lenten missions and parish penitential celebrations will often draw more than fifty people, many of whom are usually seniors. Therefore, effective immediately and until further notice, I am putting in place throughout the Diocese of St Paul the following measures:

- All weekend and weekday Masses in the Diocese of St Paul are cancelled. For the duration of this period, I grant to all the Catholic faithful the dispensation from their Sunday obligation. Since the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the very heart of our Catholic life, this banning of public worship will be a cause of real hurt and suffering. Let us accept this as our civic duty at this time, and offer this moment in sacrifice to God for the sake of all who are ill from the COVID-19 virus.

In these extraordinary circumstances, I encourage everyone to participate "remotely" in the celebration of the Eucharist by tuning in to **daily Mass with** Salt and Light on T V. In addition, the Diocese will explore the possibility of livestreaming Sunday Mass which would be accessed on our diocesan website. Further information about this will be forthcoming.

With respect to the Liturgies of Holy Week, further directions will be also forthcoming in the next week.

- All Lenten parish missions are cancelled. Parishes may consider livestreaming or recording the presentation of the speaker for posting on the parish website, but no public gathering is to be held.
- All parish penitential celebrations are cancelled. Priests will remain available to hear confessions, but the use of the confessional is prohibited throughout the period of this pandemic. Instead, confessions will be heard face-to-face in reconciliation chapels or

other spaces that both protect confidentiality and allow the medically required distancing between priest and penitent. Those who wish to confess anonymously behind a screen are invited to wait until after the pandemic, and are reminded that the obligation to confess serious sin once annually does not need to be fulfilled prior to Easter; it can take place at any time throughout the year. Of course, our priests stand ready to visit persons in hospital or confined to home who request Holy Communion, Confession or the Sacrament of the Sick. In every case they are expected to practice appropriate risk reduction.

- All celebrations of Baptism, First Eucharist, First Reconciliation and Confirmation are postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised that the pandemic has ended. At that point, I shall grant to our pastors any necessary delegation enabling them to celebrate these sacraments at times they themselves determine in consultation with parents and guardians. This directive applies likewise to the celebration of Initiation into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. This, too, is to be postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised that the pandemic is ended.
- Sacramental preparation classes for both children and adults are cancelled. Catechists will provide to parents the resources necessary to help them complete at home the remaining instruction to be given to their children. In the case of the RCIA, the pastor or catechist may proceed with the personal interviews of the candidates to determine their readiness.
- Funerals may continue to be celebrated in our churches. In consultation with the relatives of the deceased, the priest celebrant will determine if participation needs to be limited to family members so as to be in compliance with prevailing medical directives. Public receptions following the funeral liturgy should not take place.

Finally parishes are strongly encouraged to keep churches open during the day. Especially in this uncertain and extraordinary time, we want to offer in this way the assurance that the Church remains close to you and ready to accompany you through this or any difficulty.

Please join with me in prayer for a rapid end to the COVID-19 virus. May God grant healing to those who are ill, and eternal rest to those who have died. May the Lord's blessing be with our medical professionals and civic authorities, who continue to strive with enormous effort and great skill to keep all of us safe.

In our Good Shepherd,

+Bishop Paul Terrio