



OFFICE OF BISHOP

DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yes, we live in challenging times as the nation and the world continue to confront COVID-19. As we have seen, the governmental directives to combat the coronavirus have been constantly changing. It is important that all of us join with our neighbors across the State of Michigan and beyond in observing measures to address the spread of COVID-19.

As we continue to practice social distancing to limit the virus' spread, our first response as the Body of Christ is to stand strong in faith. We must remain calm and confident that the Lord is guiding our journey through these times, just as the Israelite people were led through their exodus to a land of new hope. We must remain a Church with living faith, and not succumb to the darkness of these days which are a part, and solely a part, of our world history. We continue to place this pandemic in the hands of our loving Father and ask our Blessed Mother to enfold us in the mantle of love and mercy.

In following directives that were issued in Governor Whitmer's "Stay At Home" Executive Order of March 23, 2020 and in place through Easter Monday, April 13, 2020, I am deeply saddened to inform you that Holy Week celebrations will not be offered publicly this year in the Diocese of Saginaw. It is important that we cooperate with and support the governor and local health officials during this time. I have issued additional directives regarding the life of our parishes, the administration of the Sacraments – particularly to those who are sick and dying – and the celebration of Holy Week.

Though we are not able to gather in our parishes during Holy Week and on Easter, it is possible for us to be connected in other ways. Please visit the diocesan website, www.saginaw.org, where you can watch daily Mass, soon find ideas about celebrating Holy Week and Easter at home, sign up to receive our email updates and more. Many of your parish websites are also wonderful resources during these days. I would ask you to please continue your financial support to your parish. They rely entirely on your contributions and your generosity. I am very grateful for your support, especially during this time.

In addition, I ask all the Faithful in the Diocese of Saginaw to join me, the Holy Father and faithful around the world in these two times of prayer this week:

1. Wednesday, March 25 – the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord – to pause at 12 noon to pray the Our Father.
2. Friday, March 27 to pray at 1 p.m. (in union with the Holy Father in Rome) and, as you are able, to receive the Plenary Indulgence that will accompany the Eucharistic Benediction from the Holy Father.

These are extraordinary times in the life of our local Church. But the Lord, in the mystery of His love, care and concern for us, offers beautiful graces to help us in this time of need. May we stay united, watchful in prayer, seeking healing especially for those who have contracted the coronavirus. Be assured of my prayers for all of you and across this nation and world. Please pray for me. Our Lady of the Assumption, pray for us.

Sincerely in the peace and joy of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Robert D. Gruss". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw

REVISED Liturgical Guidelines and Protocols During the Time of Suspension of Public Masses

Catholic Diocese of Saginaw + March 24, 2020

INTRODUCTION

New directives were issued in Governor Whitmer's "Stay At Home" Executive Order of March 23, 2020 and remain in place through Easter Monday, April 13, 2020.

We must continue to practice social distancing – maintaining that six foot space between persons. We are to limit the number of people gathered in any given place, and limit the amount of time we spend with those gathered. Our challenge remains as to how to be pastorally present while honoring these protocols. With Governor Witmer's Executive Order, we are also asked to stay home if "in-person is not necessary to sustain or protect life." Therefore, I am implementing the following new Guidelines for the Diocese of Saginaw.

General Principles

1. In cooperation with the governor's executive order, **parish offices are to be closed** and employees, as they are able, are to work from home. Pastors and parish life directors should take precautions to keep their churches clean and open, if they are able, for private prayer and for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (if it is reserved). A timeframe for this is best determined by each pastor or director of parish life.
2. Parishes should look for innovative ways to remain spiritually connected to their parishioners, supporting them through whatever means are available. This could include livestreaming of Masses and supporting the catechesis of the faithful through electronic means. Parishes may consider collaborating with other parishes to provide high-quality options for the faithful.
3. In light of the Governor's Executive Order to Stay Home, the Diocesan prohibition on public Masses is being extended at this time to April 13, at which time it will be determined if the prohibition will need to be extended. Priests are to continue to celebrate private Mass daily, remembering the efficacious nature of the Mass even without the presence of the faithful and to fulfill Mass intentions which have been allocated. Pastors are reminded of their obligation to offer the Sunday Mass for the people of the parish. In parishes where Mass Intentions have already been set for a given day, the daily Mass of the priest(s) should be offered for that intention. Mass Intentions that are not able to be offered at this time should be rescheduled for a later date.

4. Since the spiritual well-being of the faithful in this time is essential, a very small number (not to exceed 10) of assistants (musician, cameraperson, server) is permitted so that a quality livestream Mass is possible.
5. Funerals are permitted with 50 congregants only or less. Priests, deacons and lay ministers are asked not to participate in Vigil (Wake) Liturgies. Funeral rites may also be graveside with the scheduling of Memorial Masses after the restrictions have been suspended. Family members in vulnerable populations should be encouraged to stay home. Social distancing is to be followed.
6. Baptisms are also to be suspended during this time. Where there is a real danger of death, the person should be baptized in the hospital or home of the parents. In danger of death, the faithful should consult with their pastors.
7. Weddings, if at all possible, are to be suspended during this time. If this is not possible, only asymptomatic family members may attend following the fewer than 50 guidelines. Family members in vulnerable populations should be encouraged to stay home. Pastors and directors of parish life should work with engaged couples to reschedule their wedding liturgies.
8. The pastoral care of the faithful must always be paramount. Therefore, priests should consider the best options for the celebration of private confession for those in dire need of the sacrament. See additional directives regarding sacramental confession and General Absolution.
9. Anointing of the Sick for those in dire need of the sacrament should still be performed in the home of the individual or in the hospital or healthcare facility, following the directives of the healthcare facility. Be sure to sanitize the oil stock before and after each anointing. Do not contaminate the sacred oil. For each anointing, use a new cotton ball (or “Q-tips”) and new oil on the cotton. (You are also permitted to use the cotton ball, and not your thumb, to anoint the head.) In the case of pastoral necessity, the hands do not need to be anointed. Be sure to then remove the cotton from the stock and properly burn it at a suitable time.
10. Holy Communion to the sick and/or homebound should be celebrated as Viaticum and in the context of ministry to the sick and dying [Pastoral Care of the Sick (PCS), Part II: Pastoral Care of the Dying, no. 197-211 – adapted to directives already in place]. In order to protect the most vulnerable, regular pastoral visits to the homebound (whether in their own houses or health care facilities) are suspended. Emergency pastoral care visits by the priest or deacon are to follow the regulations established and imposed by the health care facilities.
11. Sacraments of Confirmation & Eucharist with Bishop Gruss are suspended for now. Bishop Gruss is considering a number of options for when all restrictions are lifted and parishes are able to celebrate communally again.

HOLY WEEK/TRIDUUM LITURGIES

Triduum liturgies are to be offered in private, keeping in mind General Principles No. 1 and No. 4.

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord and all Triduum Liturgies with Bishop Gruss will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption. Please see below for dates and times.

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Private Mass ONLY (keeping in mind No. 1 and No. 4 above)

The *Third Form: The Simple Entrance* should be utilized. Palms are not to be distributed in the parish during the Stay-At-Home Executive Order and may be distributed at a later time. To ensure that palms do not dry out or mold, it is suggested that the palm branches are left in the plastic bags and placed in a very cool area, preferably a refrigerator or cooler if possible, until they can be distributed to the people (which may be several weeks away).

Mass will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption at 10:00 AM.

Chrism Mass

Given the new directives from the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (19 March 2020), Bishop Gruss is postponing the celebration of this year's Chrism Mass to a time to be determined (after the restrictions have been suspended) when all the priests can attend.

Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)

Private Mass ONLY (keeping in mind No. 1 and No. 4 above)

As indicated in the **Roman Missal** (Mass of the Lord's Supper, no. 1), it is an evening Mass. Note: The Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has granted permission for the liturgy on this day to be celebrated without the people due to these extraordinary circumstances (DECREE "In time of Covid-19") *The Washing of the Feet* would be omitted. At the end of the Mass, the procession of the Blessed Sacrament to the place of repose is to be omitted and the Blessed Sacrament is to be kept in the tabernacle. Priests who are unable to celebrate Mass should instead pray *Vespers* of the day during which time Bishop Gruss is asking for prayers for the unity of the whole Church and for the safety and health of all people.

Mass will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption at 7:00 PM.

Friday of the Passion of the Lord (Good Friday)

Private Liturgy ONLY (keeping in mind No. 1 and No. 4 above)

If celebrated privately and the cross is displayed in the Church for private veneration, it should be revered by a genuflection or profound bow without kissing or touching the cross.

A prayer "For an end to this pandemic" is to be added to the Solemn Intercessions during this liturgy. See below.

If this is not celebrated, during the time appointed for *The Adoration of the Holy Cross*, Bishop Gruss is asking all priests to spend an extended period of time in prayer, praying especially for the unity of the whole Church and for the safety and health of all people.

This service will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption at 3:00 PM.

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night (Easter Vigil)

Bishop Gruss is dispensing all priests from celebrating the Easter Vigil.

He is asking all priests to pray the *Office of Readings* for Easter Sunday.

Note: The Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has given special instructions for this Mass this year (DECREE “In time of Covid-19”). No adjustments to the start time of the Mass have been made so it may not begin until after dusk.

1. Administering the Sacraments of Initiation to those in RCIA is to be postponed until a later date when the fuller community can be present (see below).
2. The preparation and lighting of the fire as well as the procession into the church are omitted. The Paschal Candle is prepared and lit; this is followed immediately by the *Exsultet*.
3. The baptismal liturgy is truncated to include only the Renewal of Baptismal Promises. Therefore the Mass should proceed thus after the Gospel:
 - a) Homily.
 - b) Renewal of Baptismal Promises, (No. 55 in Roman Missal for “Easter Vigil”), omitting the blessing of the water and the sprinkling.
 - c) Preparation of the Altar and Offertory (Mass continuing as usual here).

This service will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption at 9:00 PM.

CATECHUMENS AND CANDIDATES FOR FULL COMMUNION

The Bishop will determine a suitable time for the reception of these members into the Church (RCIA, 26-27).

- a) This will be announced in advance to allow proper preparation.
- b) At the time of the announcement, a plan for (or dispensation from) the Scrutinies will be announced (RCIA, 20, 30).

Catechumens and Candidates for Full Communion have been a part of the RCIA process for many months and are supported by the RCIA team and parish. Part of our Easter joy is the parish seeing and celebrating their entrance into the Church.

In the case of an emergency, a person may at any time be baptized, confirmed or received into the Church.

Easter of the Resurrection (Easter Sunday)

Private Mass ONLY (keeping in mind No. 1 and No. 4 above)

This Mass will be livestreamed from the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption at 10:00 AM.

Holy Week Services are to be continued in parishes which are able. Pastors are to take into account General Principles No. 1 and No. 4 above.

Good Friday Solemn Intercession XI.

XI. For an end to the pandemic

Let us pray, dearly beloved, for a swift end
to the coronavirus pandemic that afflicts our world,
that our God and Father will heal the sick,
strengthen those who care for them,
and help us all to persevere in faith.

Prayer in silence.

Then the Priest says:

Almighty and merciful God,
source of all life, health and healing,
look with compassion on our world, brought low by disease;
protect us in the midst of the grave challenges that assail us
and in your fatherly providence
grant recovery to the stricken,
strength to those who care for them,
and success to those working to eradicate this scourge.
Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

LITURGICAL ADVISORY

Given the above guidelines and protocols, you may wish to consider the following:

Most parishes have standing orders for their palm branches. Do not cancel this order. You will need palm branches to bless (either during the priest's private Mass or at another designated time). Palms are not to be distributed in the parish during the Stay-At-Home Executive Order and may be distributed at a later time.

LITURGICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SACRED SPACE

Given the fact that there will not be public liturgies during Holy Week and the Triduum, this would not mean that you would ignore “decorating” our worship spaces according to the appropriate liturgical day and/or season (e.g. covering of statues, palm branch arrangements, crosses, lilies and/or spring flowers, etc.). However, prudence should guide you to the extent of such enhancement. In other words, the common sense approach to liturgical environment is always “less is more.” Given our present situation and circumstances, good stewardship of the parish’s financial resources must also be considered.

PARISH AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION

Pastors and directors of parish life are encouraged to tap into all the media resources available (e.g. website, text, email, bulletin, Facebook, My Parish App, etc.) to provide connection, care, comfort and appropriate communications with their parishioners. For example, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) who regularly visit the sick and/or homebound might consider making phone calls or sending greeting cards. Faith Formation leaders, Youth Ministers and teachers might do something similarly – of course age appropriate. The diocese has also published on our website various prayers, activities and resources to assist at this time. They may be passed along to your parishioners via your communication conduits. More things are being added as time goes on.



SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Pastors and directors of parish life may choose to communicate to their parishioners how to make a *Spiritual Communion*.

ACT OF FAITH: O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches because you have revealed them who are eternal truth and wisdom, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die. Amen.

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1 Make an act of faith
Come up with your own prayer or use a traditional one to express to the Lord our faith in his real presence in the Eucharist.

2 Make an act of love
Say a prayer that expresses your love and gratitude to the Lord. Thank Him for his infinite love as well.

4 steps for Spiritual Communion
CatholicLink

3 Express your desire to receive him
As you are not able to physically receive the Lord, express your desire to receive Him in your heart.

4 Invite Jesus to come into your heart
With a humble and contrite heart we ask the Lord to come to us just as He would if we were able to receive the sacrament.

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