



DIOCESE OF RAPID CITY

Memorandum

TO: Priests of the Diocese of Rapid City
FROM: Very Rev. Michel Mulloy, Diocesan Administrator
DATE: March 18, 2020
SUBJECT: Changes in Light of the Suspension of Public Masses

Brothers,

In light of the announcement yesterday regarding the suspension of public Masses, this memo offers more detailed guidelines on suspension of activities in the diocese and our parishes. Thank you for your willingness to receive these guidelines.

Yesterday I met with the Consultors and selected Chancery staff whose jobs are immediately affected by these decisions. We discussed a wide range of activities in the diocese and parishes that might be affected by implementing CDC guidelines. This list is the result of that discussion. It is important that we are as consistent as possible moving forward. As always, you will have to make prudent decisions for your parish, but my hope is that one priest's decisions would not adversely affect a brother priest or parishioners in a neighboring parish. Needless to say, we are all on edge about this whole situation and working together is important so that we can lead our parishioners as effectively as possible.

I have posted a video message on the diocesan website and Facebook page to communicate with parishioners in a more personal way the reason for this suspension and a call the spiritual renewal through the sacrifice this situation has demanded of us all.

I. Regarding the celebration of Mass:

- a. There will be no celebration of daily or Sunday Masses in public.
- b. Priests may celebrate mass privately, perhaps before the church is opened in the morning or after it is closed in the evening.
- c. Those who live in the rectory (priests or a priest and seminarian) may participate in this private Mass because they are already living in close proximity.
- d. Priests are discouraged from inviting other people, including parish staff members, to come and celebrate. This sets up confusion and also a sense of "privilege" for those who are included.
- e. Priests are asked to include a prayer for parishioners and the whole diocese in their Mass intentions and let the people know this.
- f. Priests are permitted and encouraged to record and/or livestream their private Mass.
- g. A list of online Masses has been posted on the diocesan website for parishioners to access.
- h. It remains unclear if public services will be allowed for Holy Week and Easter Sunday, but as the press release said, it is best to be prepared for this to continue through that time if necessary.

II. Access to Parish Churches:

- a. Priests are encouraged to leave churches unlocked during the day for people to come and pray, and asked to follow the guidelines put out by the Center for Disease Control regarding the number of persons who can be in the church at any one time. The recommendation is no more than 10 right now. It is unclear if that will change in the future. The CDC also encourages that people maintain six feet of distance from each other. In smaller parish buildings priests will have to determine how many people should be in the church at any one time. In larger churches pastors may set a predetermined number, while reminding parishioners of the recommendation for a six-foot separation.
- b. Priests should encourage people to engage in devotional prayers and consider providing copies for them to use (following CDC recommendations for paper hygiene). Pastors may suggest certain times for praying devotions together, such as the rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet, but quiet, personal prayer is also important.
- c. Pastors of parishes that regularly offer Eucharistic Exposition and Adoration, are encouraged to continue these practices, while ensuring that the guidelines of the CDC are followed.
- d. If pastors regularly lock church doors on a particular schedule, they are encouraged to continue this practice.

III. Diocesan Events:

- a. All diocesan events are canceled until further notice.
- b. The Terra Sancta Retreat Center will have limited hours. All visitors are asked to use the west main entrance. Other doors will be locked. Events and group activities will be canceled. Rooms used by individuals or small groups will be disinfected according to CDC guidelines. Retreat staff will notify those responsible for scheduled events that they may be canceled depending on the date and when these restrictions might be lifted.
- c. Heart to Heart Retreats are still scheduled in April, July and November. If this situation persists and cancellations are required, pastors will be notified so that they can work with couples preparing for marriage. It is possible for couples to attend the Heart to Heart retreat after marriage and it would be imprudent to postpone a wedding for this reason alone. Unlike many other events, video conferencing would not work for a retreat like Heart to Heart.
- d. The Chrism Mass will not be publicly celebrated this year. Bishop Mark Rivotto from St. Louis was scheduled to preside and is still willing to come if that is possible. The priority is getting the oils blessed. Clergy will be informed of the final plans for this celebration.
- e. VSI classes will be offered online through the normal process that participants would use if they missed a class. Questions should be directed to the Faith Formation Office.
- f. Deacon Formation Classes will be conducted online or cancelled. The directors will keep the participants informed.

IV. Parish Events:

- a. First, it needs to be clearly stated that priests need to consider their own health and wellbeing when making decisions about parish activities and events. Many of our clergy are in the vulnerable age group for this disease. All of our priests are vital to the mission

of the Church. Even though some of these decisions may cause anxiety for parishioners, it is important that priests protect themselves as well as others.

- b. Please cancel all parish activities and events. Below are some additional guidelines and suggestions:
 - 1) Baptism may be celebrated apart from Mass, applying the CDC guidelines. Families should be informed that they may have no more than ten people present. (If the CDC guidelines change, this can be adjusted accordingly.)
 - 2) Confirmation will be put on hold for now. The next Confirmation is scheduled on April 18th and the situation could change by then, for better or for worse. Pastors should inform parishioners that the diocese is in a wait-and-see mode and they should be prepared for Confirmation to be delayed. Depending on the situation with a new bishop, it may be necessary to renegotiate the schedule and perhaps delegate pastors or deans to assist with Confirmation.
 - 3) First Communion and First Reconciliation should be postponed until they can be celebrated with the whole family and parish gathered. If there is an urgent pastoral need, these two sacraments could be conferred in a more private setting where only the family is present. CDC guidelines should be followed concerning the size of the group.
 - 4) Funerals may be celebrated in the following ways.
 - i. No wakes will be celebrated, which should be communicated with sensitivity to cultural differences.
 - ii. Families could be informed that a very small funeral can be celebrated, following the prescribed guidelines published by the CDC regarding the number of people who can attend and their placement in the church.
 - iii. If the number of essential family members would exceed the CDC requirements, the second option would be to have only a private burial at this time and then celebrate the funeral Mass at a later date when the family could all gather. This might be advantageous in light of concerns about possible travel restrictions and virus migration.
 - iv. It can be challenging to limit the number of persons participating and/or determine who is family, especially in light of various cultural expectations. Pastors need to be sensitive and prudent but at the same time consistent in asking that guidelines be followed. They also need to protect themselves from risk.
 - v. Funeral meals should be eliminated or discouraged.
 - 5) Weddings may be celebrated within the guidelines of the CDC.
 - i. Couples may have a small church wedding with immediate family that complies with the CDC guidelines.
 - ii. Receptions should not be allowed on parish property and discouraged in general.
 - iii. Couples may also delay their weddings until a future date.
 - 6) Anointing of the Sick should be given to those who are seriously ill and in danger of death. Priests should take the necessary precautions of washing hands before and after and sanitizing book covers and oil stocks. The short form of the anointing is encouraged, and the priest should not linger too long in the situation.

- Anointing on the forehead is sufficient if there is a concern about touching the hands. Disposable surgical gloves may be worn or a cotton swab may be used to administer the oil. Viaticum should be ministered when appropriate.
- 7) Other visits to the sick and homebound should be suspended. (Those who normally would have been visited by the priest or minister.) Communion should not be offered to persons who are unable to attend Mass during these restrictions on celebrating public Masses.
 - 8) Priests are encouraged to ask those who assist in visiting the sick to call them regularly to check in and simply offer human connection and concern.
 - 9) Penance Services should be cancelled. Priests should make themselves available for the private celebration of this sacrament. Priests are encouraged to celebrate Penance in a room large enough to allow a distance of six feet between the priest and penitent. Care should be taken to ensure that privacy is observed. With the absence of Penance services, it would be helpful to offer additional time for this sacrament, ensuring that the penitents are not gathered in too large a group and maintain a safe distance from one another.
 - 10) Formation events in parish facilities should be cancelled until further notice. The Faith Formation Office and the Youth and Young Adult Office are putting together a list of resources that can be used remotely to continue the formation process. Please check the diocesan website or call the offices to discuss any question and concerns.
 - 11) Families could also be encouraged to pray the rosary, Stations of the Cross or other devotions. With the information provided by the Faith Formation and Youth and Young Adult Offices, parents can lead their children in formation activities at home.
 - 12) The Terra Sancta staff will also be available to assist pastors and parish staff in setting up Zoom video conferencing so that formation classes can be conducted online. This would be especially important for RCIA classes or other formation events that must be completed on a set timeline prior to the next step in each participant's faith journey.
 - 13) Parish facilities should not be made available for outside use with the exception of 12-Step groups and blood drives. Pastors will have to use due discretion in granting exceptions for these activities, which are necessary for the health and well-being of participants. Again, CDC guidelines should be employed, and any facilities used should be cleaned and sanitized following each event.

V. Outreach – Needless to say, this present situation is putting a strain on everyone emotionally, spiritually and physically. The impact of this situation on the poor and most vulnerable is of special concern. Already individuals are experiencing a loss of income, and the number of people experiencing homelessness is projected to increase dramatically in the near future. All pastors are urged to be mindful of this possibility and to provide assistance according to their best pastoral judgment. Contact local outreach agencies and organizations for current information about the needs. It will be necessary to find creative ways to reach out while continuing to take precautions to prevent any risk of infection.

VI. Finances are also being affected by this both on the parish and the diocesan level. Do not hesitate to visit with Rick Soulek about any financial questions or concerns.

Helpful canons regarding ecclesiastical authority in these circumstances:

Can. 213 – The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments.

Can. 843 – The sacred ministers cannot refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.

Can. 223 §1 – In exercising their rights the Christian faithful, both as individuals and when gathered in associations, must take account of the common good of the Church and of the rights of others as well as their own duties toward others.

§2 – In the interest of the common good, ecclesiastical authority has competence to regulate the exercise of the rights which belong to the Christian faithful.

Resources

Below are links to related CDC guidelines. Information about the availability of Masses are listed on diocesan the website. If you have resources that have been helpful, please share those as well. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

CDC links

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

Cleaning: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Overall Checklist for Faith Leaders: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/checklist.html>

USCCB list of online Masses and other resources can be found at www.CatholicCurrent.org/covid19.

Other USCCB postings: www.usccb.org/coronavirus.

Spiritual Communion Prayer Card: Attached

Novenas

Coronavirus Novena from Sister Samantha: Attached

Novena to St. Rocco, patron saint against plagues: <https://catholicnovenaapp.com/novenas/st-rocco-novena/>

Novena to Our Lady, being promoted for prayer in various places: <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/smcafee/pray-this-marian-novena-for-protection-against-coronavirus>

Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, our diocesan

Patroness: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/novena-to-our-lady-of-perpetual-help-11872>
Novena to St. Joseph, Protector of the Church: https://www.stjosephsite.com/SJS_Ninedays.htm