



MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, Religious Houses

From: Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas

Re: Additional Guidelines during the Temporary Suspension of Masses and Liturgies

Date: 18 March 2020

*In my flesh I am completing what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ
on behalf of his body, which is the Church (Col. 1:24).*

Please know of my gratitude, support, and prayers as together we navigate the uncharted waters of this pandemic and do our best to respond to the pastoral and spiritual needs of our people.

Following upon the decision to suspend public celebrations of Mass/liturgies throughout the Diocese of Toledo, and already having received a number of inquiries, kindly find below specific guidance on how best to proceed with celebrating the sacraments, and other answers to questions you may have during this unprecedented health crisis. We each must do our part to slow down this epidemic and protect the common good for the people of God entrusted to our care. Please know how grateful I am that you will thoughtfully exercise prudent and pastoral judgment when confronted with unique pastoral challenges. As always, we stand ready to assist you in any way. Please do not hesitate to contact: dcirata@toledodiocese.org; ddemski@toledodiocese.org.

KEEPING CHURCHES OPEN FOR PRIVATE PRAYER

According to local circumstances and while ensuring appropriate security, our churches may remain open for private prayer. The parish, at its discretion, may establish and communicate set times when the church is open. Necessary precautions should be taken to clean and sanitize the church. The following are some additional suggestions to keep your church a safe place during this health crisis:

- Parishioners should be encouraged to make every effort to observe the highest standards of hygiene.
- Remove unnecessary items that are in common areas and are regularly touched.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION AND TELEVISED/BROADCAST MASSES

Parishes are encouraged, if possible, to televise, radio broadcast, or live-stream Mass, providing the opportunity for the faithful to remain close to the Holy Eucharist during this difficult time. Please share with your people all the opportunities to view/listen to Mass by way of live-streaming, EWTN, Catholic radio, or other opportunities to participate in the sacred liturgy online in the weeks going forward. Kindly recommend to the faithful a prayer for them to make a spiritual communion while viewing/listening to Mass.

BAPTISMS

At this time the baptism of infants may be celebrated based on pastoral need. The celebration of the sacrament should be limited to immediate family members and godparents in order to prevent the potential spread of the virus to a vulnerable population. Pastoral prudence in scheduling should be exercised if more than one family is requesting baptism for their children. During this time, it would be prudent not to celebrate “immersion” baptisms. Use fresh water that has been blessed for the baptism and immediately empty the font afterwards. Family members who are especially vulnerable should be encouraged to remain at home.

INDIVIDUAL CONFESSIONS

During these most unusual times, the people of God are encouraged to seek the Lord’s mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Every consideration should be given to making the Sacrament available, perhaps during a time when the church is open for private prayer. In order to safeguard the health of the priest and the penitent, the following are suggested:

- The penitent should always have the option, and even be encouraged during this time, to celebrate the sacrament anonymously.
- Consideration may be given to celebrating the sacrament in the body of the church, provided that an appropriate screen and the necessary confidentiality can be maintained.
- If confessions are heard in a reconciliation room, appropriate measures to sanitize the room should be observed.
- Given that sacraments are incarnational encounters with the person of Christ, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not to be offered via telephone or electronic media.

CONFIRMATIONS

All individual parish and Cathedral Group Confirmations scheduled before Easter Sunday have been postponed, with the hope of being re-scheduled as soon, and as safely, as possible.

CELEBRATION OF MASS

The public celebration of Mass is suspended through and including Easter Sunday. Priests are encouraged to celebrate Sunday and daily Mass without a congregation, either alone, or only with those few ministers necessary, in accord with canon 904 and GIRM #254.

Remembering always that in the mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is exercised continually, priests are to celebrate frequently; indeed, daily celebration is recommended earnestly since, even if the faithful cannot be present, it is the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their principal function (Canon 904).

Mass without a congregation may appropriately be celebrated in the parish church (preferably not at a regularly scheduled Mass time to discourage group attendance), chapel, in the rectory, or the priest's private residence, always in a manner that respects the sacred liturgy. A limited number of ministers who are considered necessary by the priest celebrant may be invited to exercise a particular role, provided they give their consent. However, there is to be no congregation present.

Justice and charity require that the Mass intentions already in place during this period be honored. If possible, priests are to offer Mass for these intentions during this period. However, it is not expected that priests would offer more than one Mass a day. If necessary, unfulfilled intentions are to be transferred to future dates. The *Pro Populo* intention is to be observed during this period (canon 534).

COMMUNION SERVICES

Since the public celebration of Mass has been suspended, Communion Services for the faithful are not to be offered. Communion Services are not to be used as a replacement for the celebration of Mass.

MATRIMONY

During this health crisis, if couples choose not to reschedule their wedding, the wedding liturgy should be celebrated with the smallest number of faithful possible (immediate family members), keeping in mind the maximum number of persons in attendance according to civil government directives. Families should discourage from attendance anyone whose health is compromised.

FUNERALS

With all due pastoral sensitivity to grieving families, a funeral liturgy may be celebrated with the immediate family in attendance. The Rite of Committal may be celebrated at the cemetery with immediate family members only, keeping in mind the call for social distancing. We encourage you to have the family/funeral home make mention in the published obituary that the funeral liturgy and burial are private and reserved to immediate family. Please keep in mind the maximum number of persons in attendance according to civil government directives. Families should discourage from attendance anyone whose health is compromised. Celebrants should keep in mind any directives from local public health officials.

VISITS TO THE SICK AND THE LAST SACRAMENTS

In conjunction with public health directives already in force for hospitals and care facilities, all visits to the sick, including in private homes, by priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, are suspended in order to safeguard the health of those who are compromised.

However, with pastoral prudence and sensitivity, priests are to continue to provide the sacraments (Penance, Anointing, and Holy Viaticum as is appropriate) for those who are gravely ill or in danger of death, for those facing serious necessary surgery, or recovering from the same.

REMAINING CLOSE TO THOSE WHO ARE HOMEBOUND, SICK OR INFIRM, AND ALL YOUR PARISHIONERS:

Here are some pastoral considerations that may help your parishioners feel cared for and connected during this difficult and perplexing time:

- Expand outreach by making phone calls to homebound parishioners and local nursing home residents and assure them of your prayers, thoughts and best wishes.
- Offer to pray with people over the phone.
- Organize individuals to go grocery shopping or run errands for others who must stay home. You can always leave groceries at the doorsteps for those most vulnerable but also in need of basic necessities and food.
- Our homeless neighbors will be encountering greater hunger as local restaurants and food pantries scale back. Encourage your parishioners to donate to local parish outreach, foodbanks, St. Vincent DePaul Society and continue to be generous to the church so that we can care for those in greatest need.
- Consider video streaming messages, homilies or prayers, utilizing Facebook, Twitter and other social media means to connect with your parishioners.

PALM SUNDAY, HOLY WEEK AND THE SACRED PASCHAL TRIDUUM

Updates for these sacred days and celebrations will be forthcoming. Please note that the Elect are dispensed from the Scrutinies.

UNITED IN PRAYER

Catholics have always joined together in intense prayer during times of crisis throughout the ages. We have ministered to the sick, attended to the dying and buried the dead. May this unprecedented time in our history bring us closer to God and to one another. May the Lord, in his mercy, continue to pour out his compassionate love on us and deliver us from this health crisis.

Grant, Lord God, that we, your servants,
may rejoice in unending health of mind and body,
and, through the glorious intercession of Blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
may we be set free from present sorrow
and come to enjoy eternal happiness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

(Collect, 44. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary)