

ARCHDIOCESE OF SANTA FE

The Catholic Center

March 13, 2020

Circular Letter to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe Concerning Restrictions Due to the Coronavirus Situation

To the People of God:

The Second Vatican Council reiterated the Catholic Church's age-old understanding that the Eucharistic sacrifice—the Mass—as “source and summit of the Christian life.” We also remember always that Jesus affirmed the two great commandments as loving God with all one's being, and one's neighbor as oneself.

We look at the current coronavirus emergency with these principles in mind. But, looking toward the welfare of all, Catholic parishes are asked to immediately suspend public celebration of Masses and other services at this time due to the dangers inherent with the current situation. Catholics are dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass until this suspension is lifted.

The Archdiocese of Santa Fe therefore asks that its parishes and other entities:

- Suspend public celebrations of Mass. Churches may remain open for individual prayer.
- Individual confessions and consultations need not be suspended.
- Suspend/postpone all other non-essential meetings and group devotions such as communal penitential services, stations of the cross, CCD, youth and adult education, etc.
- Postpone or cancel if possible other rites such as baptisms, quinceañeras, weddings, funerals, etc. If held due to extraordinary circumstances, limit attendance to 20-30 persons and perform the rite without Mass.
- Eucharistic adoration may continue, but limit the number at any one time according to the size of the space utilized.

Other instructions:

- Archbishop Wester dispenses RCIA candidates from the first and second scrutinies. The third scrutiny, which cannot be dispensed, may be accomplished outside of Mass according to the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, paras. 34.2 and 331.
- Validations of marriages in preparation for reception into the Church may continue without Mass and with minimal attendance.
- Anointing of the seriously sick and dying may be conducted by priests, who should be assiduous in pre/post hygienic procedures and consider replacing their oil stocks after the anointing.

The decisions leading to these instructions are not made lightly, as we are keenly aware that they will be upsetting to many of the faithful. However, mindful of the responsibility for the care of all souls, this very temporary suspension of public Mass is weighed against the tragic possibility of facilitating an epidemic with its resultant sickness and the possibility of hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths.

Therefore, the weight must fall on the obligation of charity for our neighbors' welfare. We recall how

Jesus Himself emphasized necessity over strict enforcement of law: “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath...*” (from Mark 2:23-28)

Illnesses in congregations can spread rapidly. One might be sacrificially dismissive with one’s own life and health, but we have the duty to safeguard the lives and health of others. Science demonstrates the exponential spread of uncontained transmission, so the actions taken today are hoped to contribute to the prevention of that possibility. Commonly-touched items can become catalysts for untold spread of contagion. Also, we cannot but be aware that, because only ordained priests are able to consecrate the Eucharist, their own illnesses/deaths may result in a lengthy dearth of sufficient priests available to serve the faithful.

All this being said, we urge all priests to continue celebrating the incomparable sacrifice and gift of the Mass at a pre-determined time each Sunday and even each day so that the souls in their care may join themselves spiritually to the Mass even *in absentia*. All are urged to read at least the Mass readings of the day and to meditate on them with their families and friends, praying for a quick end to our current situation and for the welfare of all. Other possible family and personal devotions include:

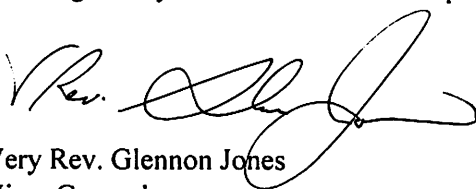
- Praying the rosary, stations of the cross and other prayers.
- Reviewing daily Mass readings (may be found on the USCCB website).
- Additional scriptural, theological or catechetical reading.
- Televised or streamed Mass.

Wherever you are and whatever you do, please be assiduous in following good hygiene.

We are in a trying time and situation, but our hope is that this action will assist in minimizing its duration. We recommend viewing it as an extended Triduum of sorts—the absence of Eucharistic Communion mirroring the loss felt by the apostles after Jesus’ death...resulting in the great joy of the reunion after the Resurrection. While the current situation is a collective “thorn” for all, we also remember St. Paul: “...*to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh...to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ ...For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Please direct questions to the Archdiocesan Communication Director Celine Radigan at 505-831-8180.

Promulgated by direction of Archbishop John Wester,


Very Rev. Glennon Jones
Vicar General