

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

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Dear Parish Family,

The immortal line "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" introduces Charles Dickens' story, "A Tale of Two Cities." That line very deftly describes our own day in the shadow of the coronavirus. While things may seem like "the worst of times," our faith reminds us that "Christ has conquered all things" (cf. John 16:33), and made every age "the best of times" as well. In this spirit, I invite you to read the following changes Bishop Taylor has mandated throughout the Diocese of Little Rock. After listing his changes, I will mention a few items relevant to Immaculate Conception specifically.

1. Effectively immediately, Sunday Mass obligation is dispensed for all Catholics.

Hence, beginning immediately Catholics are not required to attend Sunday Mass through the end of April. Nonetheless, we will have regularly scheduled Masses this weekend (March 14-15) so I can address this unprecedented protocol with our parish family. You are not obligated to attend Masses this weekend, and anyone who is elderly or has health issues or a compromised immune system should stay home. Still, perhaps now more than ever we need the strength, comfort and grace of the Eucharist.

2. Churches will be kept open for private prayer and Eucharist Adoration during daylight hours as an alternative to Sunday Mass.

At IC we already keep the church doors open during church office hours, as well as on Sundays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. We will continue to do the same; we will, however, cancel daily Masses (English and Spanish) beginning Monday, March 16. Hence, no Mass on Monday, March 16. The Adoration Chapel at St. Boniface will close Sunday, March 15, at 8 p.m. and remain closed through April.

3. All non-essential gatherings at parishes are canceled or postponed for the rest of March and April pending further notice.

This means that beginning Friday, March 13, we will cancel the evening Stations of the Cross, as well as the meatless meal afterwards for the remaining Fridays of Lent. Additionally, we will cancel religious education classes, the First Communion Retreat, the first reconciliation, bingo, bible studies, cub scouts, youth groups, etc. at least through the end of April. Basically, no group meetings until the end of April.

4. Face-to-face confessions are suspended and confessions may only be heard with a physical screen/barrier.

The priests will be available at the regularly scheduled times to hear your confessions (Tuesdays at 5-6 pm, Thursdays at 5-6 pm, and Saturdays at 3:30-5 pm). We ask you to come to the side of the confessional that has the screen, not face-to-face. The two sides are clearly indicated on the confessional doors.

5. Only those entering the Church through RCIA may be physically present for the Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil).

After consultation with the RCIA staff, at Immaculate Conception we will determine whether to bring the RCIA candidates into full Communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil or at another fitting feast, such

as Pentecost (May 31), so their family and friends can attend. Please stay tuned for further developments.

6. On Palm Sunday, priests will hold a short private service, after which blessed palms will be available for the public to pick up outside the church. Early on Palm Sunday, we will celebrate a short private Palm Sunday service. Afterwards, around 9 am, we will make the blessed palms available outside the north entry of the church. We invite you to watch the Palm Sunday Mass on television. Maybe you can catch Pope Francis on television.

7. The parish priests stand ready to respond to your calls for anointing of the sick. Please call the parish office (479-783-7963) during regular office hours, or after office hours, use the emergency protocol by following the prompts after calling the office. We will not have communal anointings or communal penance services at least until the end of April because of the inherent threat of contagion in large crowds.

8. The closure of Catholic schools will depend on the decision of public school officials. The superintendent of Catholic schools has directed us to follow the lead of public schools regarding closures.

9. Church offices will continue to operate during our scheduled business hours. If you are sick with a contagious illness, please do not come to the church office, but try to conduct your business over the phone. We will do our best to honor all scheduled appointments

10. In the case of a funeral, the priests will meet with the family and have a private funeral Mass for the deceased. Funeral Masses will not be open to the public to attend. Nevertheless, we highly encourage you to pray for those who have died by praying the rosary and visiting their graves.

11. The priests will continue to offer private Masses. We will pray for the repose of the souls of our beloved deceased, like those mentioned in the bulletin each week. We will take care to celebrate Masses for those Mass intentions people have specifically requested.

12. Please be mindful of your financial contributions to the church. If at all possible, please do not neglect contributing financially to the church during these troubled times, such as online by We Share, automatic bank draft, by mail or personally delivering them to the office. Our parish cannot operate efficiently without your generous contributions.

A very thin line divides paranoia and prudence, and it feels like my feet are planted solidly on both sides! While we keep our feet firmly planted on earth, let us turn our eyes to heaven and to Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

God bless!
Fr. John