

## ***Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon***

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## **Public celebration of Mass cancelled in Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon because of COVID-19 concerns**

**March 19, 2020** - All public Masses in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon will be suspended until further notice in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, especially among the most vulnerable.

In a letter to the faithful March 17, 2020, Bishop Mark Hagemoen announced a number of restrictions as a way to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, particularly among those most vulnerable to serious complications.

"The spread of the virus in our province and around the world is a matter of grave concern for all of us," said the bishop. "Given the extraordinary circumstances we face at this time – especially that place significant risks on certain members of our congregations (especially our elders and those who are infirm) - taking dramatic action is necessary as it might save lives!"

The new directives for Catholics in the diocese of Saskatoon came on the heels of many other cancellations and measures in the province, including the closing of schools effective March 20, the suspending of classes at universities and colleges, early end to the formation year for students of St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission in Bruno, and the cancellation or the postponement of many community and faith events, including Pentecost 2020 -- a large gathering of Christians being planned for Pentecost Sunday, May 31.

**All weekend and weekday Mass celebrations are cancelled in the Catholic diocese immediately**, until further notice, according to the directives released by Saskatoon's Roman Catholic Bishop on St. Patrick's Day. For the duration of this period, Bishop Mark Hagemoen has granted to all the Catholic faithful dispensation from their Sunday obligation to celebrate Mass.

"The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the very heart of our Catholic life, and I realize that this directive will be a cause of great suffering. However, we observe this as our civic duty at this time, and offer this moment in sacrifice to God for the sake of all who are ill from the COVID-19 virus," he said.

**Bishop Mark Hagemoen's message to the faithful: [LINK](#)**

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He encouraged Catholics to tune in to broadcast of the Mass on [Salt+Light Catholic Media Network](#), on [Vision TV](#) or online at [dailytvmass.com](#) (daily and Sunday Mass). As well the diocese of Saskatoon will begin live-streaming Sunday Mass and providing other faith resources at a new central website: <https://saskatoonmass.com> with links shared on the diocesan website and on social media (Facebook and Twitter.)

With respect to **Holy Week liturgies**, leading up to Easter: "further directions will be forthcoming in due course" as will more information about cancellation of diocesan events, the bishop said.

Other measures that take effect immediately in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon include the **cancellation of all public gatherings** such as Lenten parish missions, as well as all Lenten penitential celebrations (prayer services with confessions). General parish gatherings are also cancelled, with only necessary activities for the care of the Church allowed, or those that can fulfill the chief medical authority criteria regarding numbers and distancing. A separate directive will be forthcoming about other diocesan events with the diocese of Saskatoon seeking "to be in full compliance with directives from the government health authorities."

While all penitential services are cancelled, **individual celebration of confessions can continue**, but must "fulfill the requirements to assure confidentiality and to allow the medically requisite distancing between priest and penitent." Under those same conditions, a Day of Confessions planned for March 25 in many parishes in the diocese can continue.

**All celebration of initiation sacraments** – baptism, confirmation, first communion -- are postponed until the Chief Medical Officer advises that it is safe to resume larger gatherings. "This directive applies likewise to the celebration of initiation into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil."

**Sacramental Preparation classes** are also cancelled, with catechists instructed to provide parents with necessary resources to continue instruction at home.

**Funerals** will continue to be celebrated in churches across the diocese. "In consultation with the relatives of the deceased, the priest celebrant will determine if participation needs to be limited to immediate family members to follow prevailing medical directives. Public receptions following the funeral liturgy should not take place."

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**Marriages:** ought to be postponed, according to the new directives from the bishop. "However, if this is not possible, the priest will consult with the couple to determine the following: the limitation of attendees to not exceed the official guidelines for group gatherings as well as following any other medical directives proscribed. Marriage preparation courses have been cancelled until further notice. Pastors will work with couples to fulfill the requirement for such preparation individually."

Parishes that normally keep their churches open during the day will retain this practice, under the new directives – but again following the required distance and number limitations outlined by the chief medical officer. "Especially in this uncertain and extraordinary time, we want to offer access to our churches to assure that the Church remains close to you and ready to accompany you through this or any difficulty," wrote Bishop Mark Hagemoen.

Guidelines for **ministry to the sick and to those who are shut-in** will be circulated in a separate directive in the near future, in consultation with health authorities.

The directives also address community caring: "we encourage our parish communities to be mindful of the need to support fellow parishioners and other community members, especially elders, the sick, and those who might be otherwise home-bound. This will require local coordination to assure compliance with the Chief Medical Officer directives."

The bishop also asked for prayers for a rapid end to the COVID-19 virus. "May God grant healing to those who are ill, and eternal rest to those who have died. May the Lord's blessing come upon our medical professionals and civic authorities, who continue to strive with enormous effort and expertise to keep all of us safe. Finally, in these unusual and distressing times, let us remember the words of Christ: 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' (*Mark 6:50*)"