



## **Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon**

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March 17, 2020 – Feast of St. Patrick

## **UPDATED DIRECTIVE TO RESPOND TO COVID-19**

### **To The Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Saskatoon:**

I am contacting you about updated directives to respond to the COVID-19 health crisis. The spread of the virus in our province and around the world is a matter of grave concern for all of us. Our diocese upholds the priority of care for the spiritual, physical, and mental health and well-being of our fellow parishioners and citizens. To this end, we rely upon our expert medical professionals to provide informed and up-to-date information, and to provide guidance to safeguard and protect all Canadian citizens. Of course, our diocese also takes very seriously the observance of our Catholic liturgies and devotional practices. 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!

Strong directives and advice continue to be updated from federal and provincial health authorities. We also experience great challenges regarding restricting the number of people gathering for Masses and other liturgies and devotions. Again, this is especially a concern given that many of our parishioners are seniors, who are potentially more susceptible to the negative effects of the virus.

Therefore, effective immediately and until further notice, I hereby direct the following measures throughout our diocese:

1) **Celebration of Mass:** All weekend and weekday masses are cancelled until further notice. For the duration of this period, I grant to all the Catholic faithful dispensation from their Sunday obligation. (cf. Code of Canon Law, 87) 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.

In these extraordinary circumstances, I encourage everyone to participate “remotely” in the celebration of the Eucharist by tuning in to daily mass on Salt+Light TV or Vision TV, or online at <https://dailytvmass.com/>. In addition, the Diocese will livestream Sunday mass at 9:00 a.m. from Holy Family Cathedral. This can be accessed on our diocesan website at [www.rcdos.ca](http://www.rcdos.ca). Some individual parishes are also



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planning to offer a livestream Sunday mass - we shall make links to those available on our website.

2) **Holy Week Liturgies:** With respect to the Liturgies of Holy Week, further directions will be forthcoming in due course.

3) **Parish Missions:** All Lenten parish missions are cancelled. Parishes may consider livestreaming or recording the presentation of the speaker for posting on the parish website, but no public gathering is to be held.

4) **Penitential Services:** All parish penitential celebrations are cancelled. Priests will remain available to hear confessions but need to fulfill the requirements to assure confidentiality and to allow the medically requisite distancing between priest and penitent. The faithful are reminded that the obligation to confess serious sin once annually does not need to be fulfilled prior to Easter; it can take place at any time throughout the year. Of course, our priests stand ready to visit persons in hospital or confined to home who request Holy Communion, Confession or the Sacrament of the Sick. In every case they are expected to practice appropriate risk mitigation.

5) **Other Sacraments:** All celebrations of Baptism, First Eucharist, First Reconciliation and Confirmation are postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised it safe to resume larger gatherings. At that point, I shall confirm my own Bishop's schedule for the celebration of First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and/or grant to our pastors any necessary delegation enabling them to celebrate these sacraments at times they themselves determine in consultation with parents and guardians. This directive applies likewise to the celebration of initiation into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. This, too, is to be postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised it safe to resume larger gatherings.

6) **Sacramental Preparation:** classes for both children and adults are cancelled. Catechists will provide to parents the resources necessary to help them complete at home the remaining instruction to be given to their children. In the case of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the pastor or catechist may proceed to the personal interviews of the candidates to determine their readiness.

7) **Funerals:** may continue to be celebrated in our churches. 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.

8) **Marriages:** ought to be postponed. 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.



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9) **General Parish Gatherings:** Should be postponed; only necessary activities for the care of the Church, and those that can fulfill the Chief Medical Authority criteria.

10) **Access to Churches:** Parishes that normally keep their churches open during the day will retain this practice. Appropriate cleaning should be observed to provide a sanitary environment. All hymnals, prayer cards, and other resource items should be removed during this time from the pews and other distribution points in the church. 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.

11) **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament:** longer periods of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament are encouraged, which may be the occasion to also provide opportunities for individual Confession, as outlined above.

12) **March 25, 2020 “Day of Reconciliation”:** can go ahead but as per #4 (above) will not feature any gathered penitential service.

13) **Diocesan Events & Celebrations:** a separate directive will be forthcoming. However, as with the above guidelines, the Diocese of Saskatoon will seek to be in full compliance with directives from the government Health Authorities.

14) **Ministry to the Sick and Shut-ins:** guidelines will be circulated in a separate directive shortly.

15) **Considerations re: Financial Support to Parishes:** guidelines will be circulated in a separate instruction shortly.

16) **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.

All other liturgical directives that I have communicated to the Diocese in earlier updates remain in place. Please join with me in prayer 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.”* (Mk 6:50)

Yours sincerely, in Christ,



✙ Most Rev. Mark A. Hagemoen



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