



DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 16, 2020

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Administrators, Religious and Faithful:

Each day we hear new reports about the coronavirus and its impact in our communities – local, state, national and global communities. Yes, these are “extraordinary” times for all of us. It is important to remain in prayer with one another and in union with Jesus at the cross. From the cross flows the grace, faith, hope and love necessary to help us during this time.

As we know, “extraordinary” measures are being taken to address this ever moving crisis. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “in accordance with its guidance for large events and mass gatherings, recommends that for the next 8 weeks, organizers (whether groups or individuals) cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States.”

In times like this, it is necessary to make difficult decisions in doing our part to help stem the spread of the coronavirus. Over the course of these past days, I have continued to monitor this situation, knowing that we must adapt our procedures as necessary. Over the weekend, I have studied and listened to the reports from medical and scientific experts. This morning I spoke with local healthcare professionals about where this crisis is taking us and what we should do going forward. What we do now, I hope and pray, will reduce the time and impact this coronavirus will have on the vulnerable people in our congregations and communities.

As has been reported, each and every one of us could be a potential carrier of this virus, regardless of how we feel. To take the necessary precautions in response to this pandemic is an act of charity toward others.

What I write to you today is very difficult news to bear. But in a greater abundance of caution and from what I have heard from the local healthcare professionals, I believe it is in the best interest given these “extraordinary” times. **Therefore, beginning tomorrow March 17 through Sunday, April 5, I am temporarily suspending all public Masses throughout the Diocese of Saginaw.** This action of suspending all public Masses flows from the Catholic Church’s essential belief in the preciousness of every human life.

With this in mind, I am asking that, through April 5th, all communal Penance Services; public Stations of the Cross; and any unnecessary parish gathering and meeting be cancelled. Individual celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated.

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It is important to mourn with those who have lost loved ones. Therefore, funerals are permitted. However, the restrictions on numbers of those attending, according to the Governor's mandates, must be adhered to. People in attendance should sit in a way that respects the social distancing guidelines. If this is not possible, families may consider postponing the funeral or memorial Mass to a later date.

A decision regarding the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will be made in the future, depending upon the situation of this crisis.

Because the celebration of Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith through which we are united in sacred Communion with the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, the decision to temporarily suspend public Masses has not been taken lightly. I am deeply saddened by people's inability to receive the sacraments in a time when we need to draw close to Our Lord Jesus Christ. But to quote Archbishop Allen Vigneron, *"As Mass is a commemoration of Christ's great act of love for us, we take this unprecedented measure with eyes fixed on him and his greatest commandment to love one another, which in this difficult time means that we ensure the health and safety of our community by following the wise counsel of local, state, and federal government and health officials."*

The holiest week of prayer for Catholics begins on Palm Sunday, April 5. In the coming days, I will provide further direction for liturgical celebrations during Holy Week and beyond - plans that are compatible with whatever the current situation is at that time and within the CDC guidelines.

Further details regarding livestream and televised daily celebration of the Mass will soon be made available. As written in my previous letter, the practice of making Spiritual Communion is important at this time. I also ask every priest to celebrate Mass in private each day for all those affected by the pandemic both near and far - especially for the sick who have contracted this virus, for those in the medical community treating patients, and for those in the scientific community working on a vaccine.

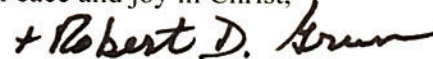
In the midst of this crisis, it is important for parish communities to look for ways to practice the spiritual and corporal works of Mercy, for example: making telephone calls to shut-ins offering consolation or bringing groceries to the homebound, etc.

I ask that together we all intensify our prayer during this current situation. With the suspension of public Masses, it is an important and opportune time for the family to come together in prayer and reflection. The Diocese will provide resources to assist you in the coming days.

Finally, I invite you to join me in calling upon our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of the Assumption, Patroness of the Diocese of Saginaw, to enfold all of us, our Diocese and our world into her mantle of love and mercy. That through her intercession we all will be kept safe from this coronavirus, and that those who have it may be led to a great healing.

With assurances of my prayers for all of you, may you experience,

Peace and joy in Christ,



Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw