



DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 13, 2020

To the People of God of the Diocese of Saginaw,

As you know, these are challenging times all across our country and the globe. Be assured that the Diocese of Saginaw is doing all we can to assist Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the State of Michigan in preventing further spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We are announcing new measures, including asking those who are most at risk to stay home and not attend Mass this weekend. I am offering dispensation to all Catholics who have concerns about their health and safety. Additionally, I am working with pastors to keep Masses below 250 people. These new measures are outlined in greater detail below.

I continue to pray for your physical and spiritual well-being as we face together this important health concern. I pray for inner peace and calm as preventative steps are taken. Yes, it is important that we stay calm and measured in our response.

As you may know, today, Friday, March 13, Governor Whitmer signed an Executive Order that mandates the cancellation of all events over 250 people and all assemblies over 250 people in an effort to slow the spread of coronavirus in Michigan. The temporary ban began today at 5 p.m. and ends Sunday, April 5 at 5 p.m. This comes one day after an announcement was made to close K-12 schools Monday through April 5.

These recent measures reinforce the need to take additional precautionary steps to avoid the spread of coronavirus in our diocese. Therefore, I ask that the following actions be taken:

- The celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of our life as Catholics. There is, however, great concern regarding the demographic of those most vulnerable to this virus. Anyone who is ill, suspects he or she is ill, or is considered vulnerable (people 60+ years of age or people with chronic illness, immune system deficiencies or other underlying health conditions) should refrain from participation in public activities, including Mass.
- Therefore, I grant a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sunday to all Catholics in the Diocese of Saginaw now through April 6. Please use your own discretion

about attending Sunday Mass. Though our churches will remain open for Mass, I ask pastors to consider how they can keep attendance below 250 – having ushers count those coming through their doors and asking people to consider attending another Mass or Mass in another parish.

- Though missing Mass causes sadness for many people, one should not feel guilty for not going to Mass. You have a free conscience to stay home. Catholics are encouraged to offer up their sickness or pastoral care for the sake of those who are seriously ill and for those who have died. I would also invite you to participate in a Spiritual Communion with the Body of Christ in the Diocese. This can be done by taking time for personal prayer – the rosary or other types of prayer, by viewing the Cathedral Mass livestream each Sunday at 10 a.m. on the diocesan website: <https://saginaw.org/cathedral-live>, on television, or listening to it on the radio (Check the Diocesan website for further information). You may also consider reading Sacred Scripture and having conversations of faith with your family as ways to keep the Lord's day.
- Parishes should cancel any non-liturgical events that will attract over 250 people or any non-liturgical event that will see people gathered in a space without the appropriate social distancing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that a distance of six-feet is appropriate. As a practical example of this, our popular Lenten fish fries should become take-out only.

The following precautions are for all parishes:

- Refrain from shaking hands during the Sign of Peace (bow or verbal gesture is appropriate) or omit the Sign of Peace.
- Refrain from holding hands during the Lord's Prayer.
- Cease distribution of the Precious Blood (Christ is fully present under both species of the Blessed Sacrament)
- Remove Holy Water from the Holy Water fonts.
- Strongly urge the faithful to receive the Holy Eucharist only in their hands instead of on the tongue to mitigate any transmission of saliva. However, that would still remain at the discretion of the Communicant.
- Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should practice good hand hygiene washing their hands before Mass and using hand sanitizer, available in a discreet location near the sanctuary, to cleanse hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion.
- In your own care for the sick – visiting homes and health care facilities – I ask you to be generous in your time and prudent in your actions. Normal cold/flu season guidelines should be followed when visiting homes. When visiting health care facilities, follow their guidance.
- We are suspending all parish faith formation classes and youth events for the same time period that the K-12 schools are closed in the State of Michigan. Pastors are encouraged to continue the formation of the Elect and Candidates for the Easter sacraments in a manner that reduces the possible spread of this virus.

There is constant change related to the COVID-19 crisis. We will continue to monitor this situation and adapt our procedures as necessary. Educate yourself on the coronavirus. The resource links provided contain more information on the coronavirus from the CDC, the Saginaw County Health Department and the Diocese of Saginaw.

Finally, we remain united in prayer and sacrifice while we continue to remain vigilant of this situation. The sick and suffering depend upon prayers, allowing us to bring Christ to them in this manner. As a reminder, on January 1, 2020, we entrusted the Diocese of Saginaw to our Blessed Mother. In the midst of this crisis, we continue to ask her to be our help and protector.

Prayer to the Virgin Mary for Protection

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope.

We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick.

At the foot of the Cross you participated in Jesus' pain, with steadfast faith.

You, Our Lady of the Assumption, know what we need.

We are certain that you will provide, so that, as you did at Cana of Galilee,
joy and feasting might return after this moment of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what

Jesus tells us:

He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the
joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God.

Do not despise our pleas – we who are put to the test – and deliver us from every danger, O glorious
and blessed Virgin.

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

Lenten Peace and joy in Christ,



Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw

<https://www.saginawpublichealth.org/page.asp?ID=3486%C2%A0%C2%A0>
<https://www.cdc.gov/Coronavirus/>
<https://saginaw.org/latest-coronavirus-guidelines-diocese-saginaw>