

March 16, 2020

Dear Priests and Faithful of the Diocese of Madison,

Lenten blessings and prayers to you in this time of challenge for our diocese, the state, the country, and the entire world, in regards to COVID-19, a strain of the coronavirus.

After having conferred with the Most Reverend Jerome ListECKI, Archbishop of Milwaukee and the provincial for the bishops of the State of Wisconsin, and, mindful of the latest restrictions and recommendations announced today from our national, state, and local health authorities, which require that public gatherings be limited to fewer than 50 people, I am providing you the latest directives with regard to the celebration of Mass and other sacraments in the Diocese of Madison.

Effective tomorrow, Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, at 12:01 am, I am suspending the public celebration of Masses throughout the Diocese of Madison. This is effective through Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>. This includes both Sunday and weekday Masses at all parish churches, oratories, and chapels. I ask that priests still celebrate the Holy Mass in their parishes, but without an assembly (i.e., “privately”). This request for priests to celebrate private Masses especially includes the Sunday and holy day of obligation “pro populo” (i.e., “for the people”) Masses as required by canon law.

This is a weighty and grave decision, and one I don’t make lightly. As Catholics, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives. In times of public crisis, people naturally turn to the Church for spiritual support and direction, and we need to continue to do whatever we can to support our faithful people through prayer, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass (private in this case), and the reasonable availability of the sacraments. However, taking precautionary measures is a prudent course of action given the civil directives and the underlying health concerns. I would ask that, where possible, our churches remain open for private prayer and that our people reserve some part of their day for private prayer or devotions at home or at church, while always obeying the civil directives and following all prudent preventative measures as articulated by health authorities. It is important to remember that Mass will still be offered regularly in every parish, albeit temporarily on a private basis, due to health concerns. I invite everyone to join themselves spiritually to the Sacrifice of Christ in the Holy Mass which heals and saves us.

Liturgies for weddings, funerals, and baptisms should still be celebrated, but priests will need to work with families to limit attendance at these events to fewer than 50 people, and to take other necessary health precautions. Communal reconciliation services should be canceled and

**O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P**

Diocese of Madison · 702 S. High Point Road · Suite 225 · Madison, WI 53719  
Phone: 608-821-3002 · Fax: 608-440-2809 · Email: [Officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org](mailto:Officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org)

confessions should be limited to individual confession. For those in RCIA, I am dispensing individuals from the Scrutinies during Lent.

All non-essential parish gatherings should be postponed, including fish fries. Schools are discontinuing face-to-face instruction this week and religious education programs should also stop for the time being. All of these measures will be re-evaluated March 31<sup>st</sup>, with additional communication at that time.

Economically, we know COVID-19 will have a negative impact on our parishes and schools. Our development office will be reaching out to parishes with assistance with online giving and other strategies and I will be consulting with pastors and other leaders to seek other solutions.

I am planning to celebrate a Sunday Mass each week which will be live-streamed. More details on the time of that Mass will follow.

Lastly, let us hold up each other in prayer during this time of concern, asking Mary Help of Christians to intercede on our behalf. Together we can pray this Spiritual Act of Communion:

**An Act of Spiritual Communion**

*My Jesus,*

*I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.*

*I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.*

*Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally,  
come at least spiritually into my heart.*

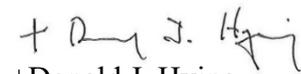
*I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.*

*Never permit me to be separated from You.*

*Amen.*

None of this is easy, but we rely on the Lord and His help to heal, guide, and bless us during this challenging and difficult time.

Sincerely in Christ,



+Donald J. Hying  
Bishop of Madison