



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Pastoral Letter

To All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious Men and Women, and Faithful Laity of the
Diocese of Fort Worth

June 26, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As your bishop, I would like to thank you once again for the efforts that all of you have made in patience and generosity during these past two months since the weekend of **May 2-3, 2020** when we in the Diocese of Fort Worth returned to the public celebration of Mass and sacraments with the adaptation of several restrictions and protocols for the sake of the safety of all. Throughout these last two months so many of you have responded to your baptismal vocation by generously giving of yourselves to your neighbor in so many ways. You have generously inconvenienced yourselves by wearing face coverings at Mass, maintaining social distancing, generously donating for the works of charity, ever more frequent hand-washing, and even staying home from Sunday Mass so as not to spread the virus among the more vulnerable.

As our elected and civic officials have recently articulated, we are currently faced with an upturn in cases of COVID-19 among our entire population throughout the State of Texas. They have counseled and, in some places, mandated through ordinance the wearing of masks in businesses and public places to prevent the spread of COVID-19 cases and to prevent the overcrowding of our hospitals. We continue to do our part in supporting the members of our community through charitably wearing masks at Mass and in religious gatherings as an expression of our religious liberty to care for our neighbor. Next week, when we celebrate the birth of our nation, the United States of America, let us especially thank God for the gift of our religious liberty that He alone has given us and that our government is established to respect and to protect. It is with this in mind that I would like to repeat and clarify the protocols that are currently and will remain in place in the coming weeks in the Diocese of Fort Worth.

1. The faithful in the Diocese of Fort Worth are still dispensed from the obligation to attend and to participate in Sunday Mass. If you are sick or exhibiting symptoms of any illness stay home. If you are over the age of 60, I am strongly encouraging you not to attend Mass. If your parish can provide a Mass exclusively for people over the age of 60, I recommend that you attend that Mass. I am strongly recommending that people over 60 years of age not distribute Holy Communion for the sake of their health.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

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2. Mindful of the obligation of charity to our neighbor, I am requiring that people in attendance at Mass wear masks or scarfs over their mouths and nose inside the church to help prevent the spread of the virus. This is not simply a strong recommendation. People will not be seated without wearing a mask. We must err on the side of caution and of protecting those who are most vulnerable to the dangerous effects of COVID-19 out of an authentic love for our neighbor—a love that befits the selfless love of Christ extended to us in the gift of the Eucharist. If you do not desire to wear a mask for any reason, please stay home and you are invited to follow the Mass by live-streaming.
3. Children under the age of two (2-years-old) are not required to wear masks in keeping with CDC recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
4. The church building will be wiped down with disinfectant in between all masses. Hymnals and other worship aids are not to be present or used at Mass. Collection plates will not be passed or handled among people. Holy Communion will not be shared under both species (no reception of the chalice). There is to be no exchange of a handshake for the sign of peace. I am asking that people forgo the venerable custom of the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue during this time of pandemic. I am asking that this continue to be done during this time of pandemic out of consideration for the health of the ordinary or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.
5. If possible, please do not forget to maintain your stewardship and to support your parish financially.
6. These same protocols and occupancy limitations apply in the Diocese of Fort Worth to the celebration of weddings, funerals, and baptisms for the sake of the safety and good health of all involved.
7. Please continue to notify your parish of any family members or friends who are shut-ins and who desire a pastoral visit.
8. The number of people who are to be in attendance at Mass will be limited to a number that can be safely present mindful of the recommendation of 50% capacity with social distancing and the required protocols of masks and sanitizing of hands. The distance of THREE FEET between persons generally equates to 50% capacity of the church building. Couples and families may be seated together as they normally would, with three feet distance separating them from others seated in church. Upon entering church at the designated entrance, people, wearing masks or scarf coverings over their mouth and nose, will have their hands sanitized and be escorted by an usher to a seat in the church. Once the church building has reached capacity, people arriving cannot be admitted and will be invited to attend another Mass, or directed to a parish hall, if available, arranged for social distancing and with live streaming.
9. Thank you for the extraordinary generosity that you have displayed in donating non-perishable food items and gift cards to your local parish that they can be distributed

through food banks and other outreach services in our parishes and local communities. Please, if you are able, continue to do so and to remember Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) as the ordinary means of delivery for care and services to the poor and those who are most in need. There will be an ongoing and growing need for these works of mercy from the faithful throughout our path to recovery. Please do not forget to maintain your stewardship and to support your parish financially, through direct giving or the mail.

10. There are to be no outdoor processions, outdoor parish gatherings, picnics, or festivals. These are places where people tend to gather in groups without social distancing. There are to be no overnight parish retreats of groups (e.g. ACTS or CHIRP retreats). Education may be held with appropriate social distancing and the requisite wearing of masks. Parish offices are to remain open but at half capacity with people wearing masks and facial coverings.
11. Policies for Catholic schools are being finalized and will be released in the very near future.

As I have previously written to you, please remember that we are walking together on a challenging path to recovery as sons and daughters of the Resurrection. With God's Grace, we are more than able to accomplish this. Please continue to pray for those most affected by the COVID-19 virus, especially those who have suffered economic hardship and loss of employment. Pray for the men and women who serve our community in government, in police and firefighting, in hospitals and nursing homes, in our military, in our food preparation and delivery services, for our priests and deacons, and for the poor and those most in need. With every good wish I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Michael F. Olson

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA
Bishop of Fort Worth

E. James Hart

Reverend Monsignor E. James Hart
Chancellor

