



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH  
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Pastoral Letter

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

**March 19, 2020**  
Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Governor of the State of Texas, the Honorable Greg Abbott, has issued an executive order with which we are to comply in carrying out our essential ministry as the Church. We should and must follow this mandate. Our intention and actions as the Church in North Texas must go beyond mere compliance but as established in the love for God and our neighbor (soul and body), as we go about the mission of salvation entrusted to us by Christ. The safety measures asked of us must be taken seriously as a way of expressing love for our neighbor. The calm with which we carry out our ministries, essential to the practice of our faith, will contribute to the common good of our society and assist even more in protecting the vulnerable during these times. **Continue to pray daily for those who suffer from this pandemic in any way; pray also for our leaders, our military, our first responders, and for the poor.**

In Christ,

*+ Michael F. Olson*

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

Additional Liturgical Adaptations for the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth

**Effective March 20, 2020**

- **MASS IS NOT TO BE CELEBRATED OUTSIDE—NO GATHERINGS.**
- Scheduled Masses must be celebrated at their scheduled times in the main church's sanctuary, without a congregation present (*sine populo*), and for the stipended intention. This includes Sunday and daily Mass. Only a priest with a deacon and/or server are to be present with appropriate social distancing maintained (A MINIMUM OF 6 FEET). No more people

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than this number are to be physically present for the Mass.

- Communion will be distributed outdoors using the social distancing of A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET between communicants and into the hand only. Ministers of Communion are reminded not to touch their faces. Hand sanitizer should be present and available while distributing Holy Communion. (See next bullet point.)
- **People are not to gather in groups for this outside; they are to wait in their cars until they are beckoned forth by an usher after Mass, one car at a time. Each person receives in a prompt and orderly manner. No one gets out of their car until they are beckoned forth by an usher. Each person is to return to their car immediately after receiving communion. A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET DISTANCE MUST BE MAINTAINED between communicants. This must be enforced for people to receive Holy Communion after either Sunday or after daily Mass.**
- Parishes with technological capability are asked to livestream at least one of the weekend Masses and to inform the faithful of the livestream. Live streaming each Mass is encouraged.
- All parish offices will be operating whether physically open or closed. **Someone must be designated to receive and to manage phone calls and incoming e-mails.**
- St. Patrick Cathedral 11 a.m. Sunday Mass will be live streamed on the diocesan web site, [www.fwdioc.org](http://www.fwdioc.org).
- Priests or extraordinary ministers in the age range of 19-59 may distribute Holy Communion using a clean, individually-provided paper towel, to known family members of shut-ins if they request Communion for their family member. The family members are to carry the consecrated host with reverence to their home-bound relative. After distributing Holy Communion, the minister of Communion is immediately to burn the paper towel. They are not to dispose of the paper towel in the trash. The minister of Communion must wash their hands for at least twenty seconds with hot water and soap before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- No more than 10 people will be allowed in the church sanctuary for private and individual Adoration. Social distancing of A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET AT ALL TIMES MUST BE MAINTAINED and the church must be wiped down frequently to prevent the spread of contagion and harming other people.
- **PRIVATE MASSES IN HOMES ARE ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN.**
- Weddings may continue in a small and private ceremony with the celebrant, the couple and no more than 2 witnesses with appropriate SOCIAL DISTANCING OF A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET BETWEEN PERSONS.
- Funerals may continue within 10-person gathering guidelines as MANDATED by the State of Texas. This includes graveside committals. My recommendation is to have a small graveside committal and schedule a memorial Mass after these restrictions are lifted. Social distancing of A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET between people present MUST be maintained.
- Confession will continue to be available, but only behind the screen, with no more than 10 people allowed in the church waiting to attend. Social distancing of A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET between penitents waiting to receive the sacrament MUST be maintained and enforced.
- Individual Baptisms for infants only may continue with only parents and godparents present at the service. Social distancing of A MINIMUM OF SIX FEET between people must be

maintained. No anointings are to be administered in the Sacrament during this time. Font should be wiped down before and after the Baptism.

- The Faithful are reminded that anyone is able to baptize a person in danger of death by pouring water over the person's head while saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
- Visits by clergy to nursing homes and hospitals, especially for anointing of the sick, are NOT RESTRICTED by the Executive Order Expanded Guidance. See this link: <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/communications-events/news/2020/03/hhs-provides-expanded-guidance-hospitals-prevent-spread-covid-19-texas>
- Pastoral ministry by phone contact should be initiated for shut-ins, especially by their family members and loved ones.
- The Diocese and all parishes are asked to be available and to reach out to local food banks and other organizations, to provide food and other essentials to the poor and those who are quarantined during this period.
- Stationary offering baskets will be available in safe places near outdoor communion distributions to allow the faithful to continue to tithe to sustain the parish and to provide care for the poor and shut in. Donations also can be mailed or sent electronically. **Collection baskets, even with handles, are not to be utilized or passed.**
- For health reasons, priests and deacons over 60-years-old are asked not to distribute Communion. They are free to exercise their own prudential judgment in accord with their vocations.
- People over the age of 60 and those with chronic conditions that compromise immunity are reminded that they are STRONGLY advised to stay home because of their vulnerability to contagion.
- RCIA and other catechism classes will be conducted online, wherever possible. No gatherings will be permitted for RCIA, including the scrutinies.
- Diocesan Catholic schools will remain closed through April 3, 2020, in cooperation and compliance with the executive order of Governor Abbott.
- Please cooperate with all civil authorities, local, county, state, and federal.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott issued a new executive order Thursday further limiting gatherings of various types during the current health crisis. The Governor's Executive Order is attached.