



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 16, 2020

To the Catholic Faithful of the Archdiocese of Edmonton,

The spread of COVID-19 in our province and around the world is a matter of deep concern for all of us. Our primary concern must always be to care for the spiritual, physical, and mental health and well-being of our fellow parishioners and citizens. To this end, we rely upon our expert medical professionals to furnish us with up-to-date and accurate information, and to guide and protect all of us with the directives they provide.

I have full confidence in the direction given to our province by the Chief Medical Officer. The liturgical directives I have given for worship in the Archdiocese have followed Dr. Hinshaw's assessment of medical risk. Until late Sunday afternoon, an exemption from the ban on public gatherings of more than 250 people was granted to places of worship. In her office's communique of March 15th, that exemption was rescinded. It is now clearly a public health imperative that liturgical gatherings in excess of 250 people not take place. A further prohibition is placed upon gatherings in excess of fifty people where it is anticipated that groups considered at high-risk, such as seniors, will be present.

Many of our Lord's Day Eucharistic celebrations on weekends normally involve more than 250 people. To ask parishes to limit the number of parishioners coming for mass to that number would not be practical. In addition, weekday masses, Lenten missions and parish penitential celebrations will often draw more than fifty people, many of whom are seniors. Therefore, effective immediately and until further notice, I am putting in place throughout the Archdiocese of Edmonton the following measures:

- All weekend and weekday masses in the Archdiocese of Edmonton are cancelled until further notice. For the duration of this period, I grant to all the Catholic faithful dispensation from their Sunday obligation. Since the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the very heart of our Catholic life, the inability to gather for this worship is a cause of great suffering. Let us accept this as our civic duty at this time, and offer this moment in sacrifice to God for the sake of all who are ill from the COVID-19 virus.

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In these extraordinary circumstances, I encourage everyone to participate “remotely” in the celebration of the Eucharist by tuning in to daily mass on Salt+Light TV or Vision TV, or online at dailytvmass.com/daily-tv-mass. In addition, the Archdiocese will livestream Sunday mass at 10:30 a.m. from St. Joseph’s Basilica. This can be accessed on our Archdiocesan website at caedm.ca. Some individual parishes may also offer a livestream Sunday mass; we shall make links to those available on our website. These will provide us with yet one more way to pray for the sick and for those who care for them.

With respect to the Liturgies of Holy Week, further directions will be forthcoming in due course.

- All Lenten parish missions are cancelled. Parishes may consider livestreaming or recording the presentation of the speaker for posting on the parish website, but no public gathering is to be held.
- All parish penitential celebrations are cancelled. Priests will remain available to hear confessions, but the use of the confessional is prohibited throughout the period of this pandemic. Instead, confessions will be heard face-to-face in reconciliation chapels or other spaces that both protect confidentiality and allow the medically requisite distancing between priest and penitent. Those who wish to confess anonymously behind a screen are invited to wait until after the pandemic, and are reminded that the obligation to confess serious sin once annually does not need to be fulfilled prior to Easter; it can take place at any time throughout the year. Of course, our priests stand ready to visit persons in hospital or confined to home who request Holy Communion, Confession or the Sacrament of the Sick. In every case they are expected to practice appropriate risk mitigation.
- All celebrations of Baptism, First Eucharist, First Reconciliation and Confirmation are postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised that the pandemic has ended. At that point, I shall grant to our pastors any necessary delegation enabling them to celebrate these sacraments at times they themselves determine in consultation with parents and guardians. This directive applies likewise to the celebration of initiation into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. This, too, is to be postponed until the Chief Medical Officer has advised that the pandemic is ended.

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- Sacramental preparation classes for both children and adults are cancelled. Catechists will provide to parents the resources necessary to help them complete at home the remaining instruction to be given to their children. In the case of the RCIA, the pastor or catechist may proceed to the personal interviews of the candidates to determine their readiness.
- Funerals may continue to be celebrated in our churches. In consultation with the relatives of the deceased, the priest celebrant will determine if participation needs to be limited to family members so as to be in compliance with prevailing medical directives. Public receptions following the funeral liturgy should not take place.

Parishes that normally keep their churches open during the day will retain this practice. Especially in this uncertain and extraordinary time, we want to offer in this way the assurance that the Church remains close to you and ready to accompany you through this or any difficulty.

All other liturgical directives that I have communicated to the Archdiocese in earlier updates remain in place. They can be found in your parish church and on our Archdiocesan website, caedm.ca.

Please join with me in prayer for a rapid end to the COVID-19 virus. May God grant healing to those who are ill, and eternal rest to those who have died. May the Lord's blessing come upon our medical professionals and civic authorities, who continue to strive with enormous effort and great skill to keep all of us safe.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton