



Diocese of Gallup
P.O. Box 1338
Gallup, New Mexico 87305

Message to the Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Gallup

March 24, 2020 at 9:00 PM MDST

Status of Pandemic

The States of Arizona and New Mexico continue to report and increasing numbers of cases of COVID-19. The nation-wide statistics seem to show some deceleration of new cases but that may be misleading due the lag in recognition and reporting. The statistics released at noon today indicate at least 48,000 cases across all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Washington D.C., and at least 601 people have died from the virus in the country. Several states have issued orders for persons not involved in “essential business” to stay home.

The Health Department of New Mexico has issued a new directive which limits people to their home except “outings absolutely necessary for their health and welfare” and for those who are engaged in providing essential services like grocery stores, health services and other business for the critical welfare of people. The number of persons allowed to gather in one place in New Mexico is now 5 and social distancing of 6 feet is strongly advised. A church gathering such as a funeral is not bound by that restricted number, but the national guideline remains at a maximum of 10 for all gatherings.

The Navajo Nation government officials have issued a directive that says the people within their jurisdiction “must remain home.” They stated exceptions as the “need for food, medicine, or other essential items, but beyond that we shouldn’t have anyone traveling or going out into the public.”

Recommendations:

As stated in prior messages, we strongly support the advice of the civil authorities in both Arizona and New Mexico plus the Navajo Nation to remain at home except for urgent necessities. All the previous restrictions on activities of the Church in the Diocese of Gallup remain in effect. Please see prior messages and the Diocese of Gallup website for recommended spiritual activity during this time of restricted movement and suspended liturgies.

Directives:

The following directives are added for clarity for the faithful and clergy of the Diocese of Gallup:

- Public celebration of the Holy Mass remains suspended
- Distribution of Holy Communion is suspended to include for the home-bound (Viaticum for the dying is the only exception)

- Anointing of the sick is limited to those in imminent danger of death.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) is limited to those settings which can meet the requirements for social distancing, space/ventilation and limitations on the number of people gathered (see previous directives). Appointment and drive-by options may be considered if all requirements can be met.
- Parish offices are expected to close to all routine business except essential activities such as emergency requests for assistance, particularly for food or life essential needs, tending to those in great distress and necessary arrangements for funerals and weddings (private). Electronic communication should be promoted as much as possible. Parish staffing requires the judgement of the pastor/administrator but should be consistent with the civil government orders applicable to their local area. The exceptions to the stay-at-home directives should be followed and only retain those few employees needed to support the essential permitted functions and charitable actions. (Note: If the office or church has any interaction with the public, then cleaning personnel may be considered essential employees to do the required special housekeeping functions for environmental safety.)
- Churches and chapels of the Diocese may open during regular hours for private prayer and devotion. Everyone must be mindful of the requirement for social distancing (at least 6 feet of space between persons or families) and the number of persons gathered must be 10 or less. That may necessitate shorter visits than usual as a courtesy to others if the number present becomes too large.
- Strongly recommend that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect parishioners and staff and to be good citizens in this effort to collectively combat a serious threat to our communities.

Other News:

The Chancery Office is closed to the public until further notice. The employees will work from home and continue communication functions as possible. Electronic communications will be the primary mode of interaction. The telephone messaging system will be monitored closely. The response time will be longer for some things, especially for matters involving the Tribunal due to the nature of that work and communications that are difficult now. This is a recommended model for parish offices that seems to meet the civil orders currently in effect in our location.

Reflections and Prayer:

Our Lord invites us to trust in Him, just like His mother did when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her. Our Lady, the model of discipleship, demonstrates humble faith, most especially in her beautiful “fiat”. May we join our voices to that of Our Lady, and pray “May it be done unto me according to your word”.

Mother of Jesus, be our protector and defender against all that is harmful or evil. Bring our needs before Almighty God, that we may be surrounded by God's Holy Angels, and give us the grace to conquer every danger and overcome all that would threaten our health and well being.

Be for us light in times of darkness, strength when we are weak, wisdom in our confusion, healing in times of illness, and courage to work through life's problems and difficulties. Give us joy when we are sad, bread to feed our hunger, and eternal life to defeat the power of death.

Virgin Mary, guide our life-journey, so that we may always walk safely together with you and your Divine Son, Jesus Christ in God's loving friendship. Amen.

Our Lady of the Annunciation pray for us.

Yours in the service of Christ,

Dcn Randolph Copeland
Chancellor

Approved by:

+ James Seán Wall
Bishop of Gallup