



All Public Masses in the Diocese of Gallup to be Cancelled; New Directives and Updates to Planned Events and Gatherings

To: All the Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Gallup
March 17, 2020- Memorial of Saint Patrick
Subject: Updated Directives for the Diocese of Gallup

The following segments present information and directives for the faithful and clergy of the Diocese of Gallup. Please check the diocesan website regularly for updates on the response to the current disease threats. Previous directives remain in force unless modified by today's announcement.

Current Status:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to accelerate in the world and the United States. Nearly every U.S. state has reported cases. The number of known cases is increasing exponentially. Those who are over 60 years of age or persons with underlying health conditions are at the greatest risk. However, many others (up to 15%) become very ill and require hospital care. The current objective of civil authorities is to curtail the spread of the disease, to minimize a sudden spike in the number of people affected which could overwhelm the health-care system, resulting in more deaths than would otherwise occur.

Epidemics are a chain reaction. The most effective measures to break the chain and minimize the spread is to prevent transmission from one person to another. This is why social distancing and isolation, especially of sick persons, is so important to maintain. Physicians remind us it is extremely important to practice good hygiene, especially frequently washing hands with soap and water, and avoiding touching surfaces on which the virus is known to remain.

Thus far, the geographic region of the Diocese of Gallup has one reported case. However, all the surrounding regions have experienced new cases in the past several days. In response to the increasing prevalence of the disease the civil governments of both states have placed restrictions on the size of meetings and schools have been cancelled. The Federal Government of the United States urges no meetings of no more than 10 persons. The surrounding dioceses have all dramatically curtailed most activity of the Church in their area of authority.

Current Directives

After consultation and prayer, +Bishop James Wall hereby issues the following diocesan directives, effective immediately and indefinitely, pending further directions:

1. The faithful of the Diocese of Gallup and those visiting are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and holy days of obligation.

2. Churches and chapels may remain open for private prayer and exercises of devotion according to schedules set by pastors and parish administrators. The bishop encourages the faithful to intensify their prayers and pious practices. Protocols for social distancing must be observed, such as practices of maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet between persons or families. The limit of 10 persons within a confined space should be maintained.
3. All public Masses are suspended until further notice, including Sunday, daily Masses and all Holy Week liturgies. Other liturgical services and public devotions are also canceled. This includes Confirmations.
4. All priests of the diocese are expected to continue daily celebration of the Holy Mass in private with prayers for the comfort and protection of the faithful and their communities.
5. All Catholic schools are will remain closed until public schools resume classes.
6. All adult and children's religion classes are suspended.
7. Special upcoming events are either canceled or postponed, including:
 - a. Priests' Day of Sanctification (April 2, 2020): Bishop Wall will celebrate the Chrism Mass privately and the holy oils will be distributed to each parish.
 - b. Deacons' Day on March 28th is Cancelled.
8. All diocesan and parish related events, meetings and gatherings are hereby suspended. This includes:
 - a. Routine meetings of organizations, apostolates, and study groups – suspended
 - b. Bingo and public meals: suspended
 - c. Other meetings: Only essential meetings for business purposes should be conducted. Social distancing and open meeting space is strongly recommended. No more than 10 persons.
9. Celebration of marriage or Masses of Christian burial may be done in private, but with no more than 10 people in attendance. The diocese recommends scheduling a public memorial Mass and Rosary after the crisis has passed.
10. The Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession *will continue* to be offered in the following way: The bishop exhorts all priests of the diocese to make available the Sacrament of Reconciliation as often and as liberally as possible. Confessional booths are not to be used until further notice. The ideal setting for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be outdoors or in a large room, and one that doesn't require the faithful to be closer than 6 feet to each other while waiting. Confessions may be heard anonymously or face to face. Bishop Wall exhorts the faithful to avail themselves to the Sacrament of Reconciliation on an ongoing basis.

Given the urgency of the coronavirus crisis, and in keeping with movement guidelines, these directives are mandatory, effect immediately.

Pastors and Administrators will post large signs on the doors of each church or chapel displaying the following information:

Bishop Wall has dispensed all the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and holy days of obligation until further notice.

The faithful are not dispensed from the Universal Church's discipline of abstaining from meat on Fridays of Lent and fasting on Good Friday. See the diocesan website for guidelines.

Bishop Wall exhorts all Catholics to make a Spiritual Communion with the Lord Jesus through prayer and various spiritual exercises, such as reading Holy Scripture, fasting and stations of the cross in private. He encourages the faithful to pray the rosary every day, especially as families.

The Diocese of Gallup will live-stream the 11:00 AM Sunday Mass and other liturgies at dioceseofgallup.org.

Another option for making a spiritual communion and virtually participating at daily Mass would be watching the Mass celebrated on RelevantRadio.com (also available live on the free Relevant Radio app).

The work of the Church continues, even in the midst of the coronavirus, especially our service to the poor and those hardest hit by the pandemic.

Reflection:

All these interruptions to our lives and the sense of uncertainty can add a lot of stress to all of us now. As Christians this becomes a time to offer our concerns to the Lord, asking for His comfort and sustaining presence as we carry out the tasks we must do. As followers of Christ, we have no reason for abject terror in the face of things like this disease. We know that this life is not our end and that death is a birth into eternal life with the One who loves us beyond measure. Yet, as a human person, it is difficult to escape the concern about the unpleasant things that may accompany one's death. We treasure life as a gift given to us by God and that impels us to respect the lives of others. Our faithful response to the current situation is best manifest by thanksgiving to God, prayer and performing charitable acts which will help others in need.

Scripture and Prayer for the Day

He got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?" (Matthew 8:23-27)

Jesus, I trust in you.

Saint Rocco, Pray for Us.

United with you in Christ,

Deacon Randolph Copeland, Chancellor, Diocese of Gallup

Approved by: +James Sean Wall