



DIOCESE OF GALLUP

PO Box 1338
Gallup, New Mexico 87305

April 1, 2020

To the Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Gallup

Status of the Pandemic:

This is an anxious time for many of us. The news is persistent with the serious aspects of the coronavirus disease but there are encouraging signs locally. The number of person infected with the virus continues to rise and also the deaths attributed to the disease. Health systems in some places like New York are nearly overwhelmed. In a few places, to include New Mexico, we are beginning to see some early signs of slowing in the rise of number of cases. This is most likely a direct result of the practices of social distancing and limited gathering which have been implemented for two weeks or more. New Mexico and Arizona are still in the early phases of the epidemic “wave” but the statistics look better than first projected. Unfortunately, we have reports of some dramatic examples of the consequences of disregarding the advice about not to congregate. That was seen in the case of the crowded religious event that took place on the Navajo Nation and resulted in multiple persons becoming infected and two died. We as Catholics miss the celebrations of this season when we are accustomed to assemble in prayer, praise, and penitence. However, we can take comfort in knowing that our restraint helps to prevent harm to others.

Resolve:

This unseen threat can cause a lot of anxiety and confusion. It is hard to fight an enemy that one cannot see. It helps to consider this a natural disaster, which it is in fact. Like many other forces of nature, the cause is not seen but the effects are dramatically manifest. One cannot see an earthquake coming but the damage we can. If we receive a warning that a hurricane is coming, the news comes long before the storm arrives. We have tools and actions that can be taken to save lives and property. We board up windows and leave for higher ground. In the same way, we have tools and actions that are effective in decreasing the effects of an epidemic. These tools are soap and water, in some cases masks and protective clothing. The action is creating distance. Deny the enemy the opportunity to spread. It cannot live long without a human host.

Social-distancing, restricted gathering, and staying at home are effective weapons. They are the best we have right now. It is a time to persevere in applying these proven epidemiological measures that have been shown effective in previous pandemics. Patience is a bitter pill, but it is necessary. The time of restricted activity may have to be extended. We cannot relax too soon or the residual infection in the community with flare back up like a fire that was not adequately extinguished.

Just as there was a gradual increase in restrictions as the epidemic approached, there will be a need for incremental relaxation of restrictions, since certain places will still have pockets of the disease that will persist while other places will enjoy better control. Eventually, the battle will come back to identifying and isolating individual cases and their contacts, until the disease can hopefully be extinguished. Complete control may not be feasible until a vaccine is available.

As faithful Christians, we turn to God and ask for his protection. We also ask for strength to do the things that are necessary, to use the knowledge we have gained to protect ourselves and others around us in the best way possible. As Catholics we are accustomed to sacrificing pleasures and activities for Lent. This Lent we have been forced give up many of our comfortable exercises and practices of our faith. Correctly oriented, we do this out of love for Christ and our neighbor, not wishing to inflict disease death upon anyone needlessly. We can offer this up along with our prayers and praise which, may not be celebrated in one place together, but still reaches God's ears in one voice, the voice of his faithful who he knows. We do this, confident that we are promoting the Gospel of Life, as this is a pro-life endeavor.

Directives for the Diocese of Gallup:

Essentially everything stated here has been addressed previously. Some of the newest restrictions in the State of Arizona raised some questions. The following guidance is intended for all the faithful as a clear restatement of each restriction. A broader explanation may be seen in the previous guidelines to the clergy. The Diocese of Gallup will continue to work in concert with the civilian authorities for the well-being of the people of this region.

- 1) **Baptisms** – only for newborns or those at imminent risk of dying. (non-public, simple rite with full rite to be scheduled later)
- 2) **Confirmations** – not to be celebrated until further notice. Catechumens and Candidates for **full initiation** will be brought into the Church at a later time.
- 3) **Weddings** – should be postponed, but if the ceremony must proceed, the number of persons present cannot exceed 10. Social distancing must be followed as best possible.
- 4) **Funerals** – may proceed but with no more than 10 persons present. It is strongly preferred that only a simple outdoor grave-side service be conducted and then schedule a memorial Mass at a later time when it is safe to do so. Social distancing must be followed as best possible.
- 5) **Holy Eucharist** - Distribution of Holy Communion is suspended, including for the home bound. Viaticum for the dying is the only exception.
- 6) **Mass** – Celebration of Holy Mass with the faithful assembled is suspended. Priests are to celebrate Mass privately in their churches or private chapels each day. Only the priests and essential staff present may attend and in no case will the number exceed 10 persons. Only the celebrant, deacon and concelebrant priests receive communion. No celebration of Mass is authorized for private groups, families or in homes.

- 7) **Confession and Penance** – The Sacrament of Reconciliation is encouraged but 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. The setting must never cause a gathering of more than 10 people in a space.
- 8) **Personal visitation to the church** – The churches may be left open for individual prayer and devotion for designated periods. The faithful are to be carefully warned by signs never to gather more than 10 persons at any one time, preferably fewer.
- 9) **Anointing of the Sick, Last Rites** – reserved only to those in imminent danger of death. Usually this is restricted to hospital and health facilities where visitation is allowed. Anointing in private homes is restricted to the dying who will not be transferred to a hospital or care facility (such as those on hospice care).
- 10) **Catholic Schools** – Closed until further notice. Continuation of classwork and home and by distance learning via electronic media is being pursued.
- 11) **Office function and staffing at the parish** – The staffing of the parish office and church property must be determined by the pastor/administrator. A church office conducts a variety of business, some of which is considered non-essential at the present time. The church office should be closed to routine business and the staffing reduced to those required for essential functions. Essential functions include those things that support the authorized religious activity detailed above plus coordinating charitable activity for persons in need, assisting those in distress (emotional and physical), paying salary to staff, maintaining communication and support for staff members working from home and necessary environmental sanitation (particularly if the faithful are allowed to visit the church for individual devotion). The staff members to perform these things can be retained as essential employees. Special efforts must be made to send home persons at higher risk for harm from the COVID-19 disease which would include those of the age over 65 and those with other serious health problems such a diabetes and heart disease.
- 12) **Limitation on gathering** – The Diocese of Gallup supports the efforts of the civic leaders our nation and both Arizona and New Mexico to reduce spread of this disease by keeping the number of persons gathered in any one place very small. The orders from the health departments of both states limited numbers and New Mexico specified 5 as the maximum. However, those orders issued by both states granted exception for religious purposes. The maximum allowed for gatherings of all kinds requested by the President of the United States was 10 persons. The directives for the Diocese of Gallup use the limit of 10 to abide by the national decree, even if the state orders are less binding. In addition, the only gatherings allowed are those specifically authorized in the preceding statements.
- 13) **General considerations** – A policy cannot be written that considers every circumstance. However, the general rule of judgement should always defer to the choices that create the least risk to the faithful, the staff, and the public except in extreme circumstances. We do not wish to create any circumstance that offers or draws persons into unsafe gatherings or hazardous activity.

14) **Exercising faith in a pandemic**– Worship, praise and prayer are still the obligations of God’s church which is a collective endeavor of the faithful and the clergy. The need to support the members of our parishes in the exercise of their faith is not diminished by the restrictions imposed. This is a time for some innovation. By necessity, we must do some things differently. Electronic media will need to be utilized to the greatest extent possible. Lay members of the community have the technical expertise to help the parish bring the Gospel and the comfort of our Lord to the faithful in their homes. We will need to work together (even at 6-feet distance) to pool our knowledge and resources. It is a time to help each other to do things that are new and even uncomfortable, but necessary to accomplish the mission of the Church in these times. It is a time to share also. There may be household without a resource for on-line access while others may have a functioning device that is not being used. In some ways, the electronic media may have caused less person to person interactions but, in our current environment, it gives us the capacity to reach out to one another in a safe manner but one that exercises compassion and caring. Physical isolation is needed to protect us from infection, but it does not have to separate us from the love we need to show for one another. Just old-fashion phone calls can help. Families may want to take advantage of Skype or similar video-sharing programs to have shared family prayers or devotions. Pastors and deacons can be included in those activities as well with a little coordination.

15) **Opportunities** – There are many options for spiritual participation and enrichment in a variety of faithful on-line sources. Please see the Diocese of Gallup website or Facebook page for ideas (dioceseofgallup.org). The parish website or Facebook page should be a site for ideas to enhance our celebrations at home in concert with video presentations. Surfing the websites of our sister Catholic churches in the Diocese can be source of shared ideas.

Bishop James Wall invites the faithful of the Diocese to join him in solidarity for worship and prayer through regular live-streamed events that can be accessed on the Diocese webpage or Facebook page via a computer, tablet or smart phone:

- 12:00 Noon - Daily week-day Mass – during Lent
- 3: 00 PM - Recitation of the Devine Mercy Chaplet plus
Prayers to Our Lady of Good Health and St. Joseph for protection
(to continue each weekday until the threat of the pandemic has lifted)
- 11:00 AM – Sunday Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral (see Palm Sunday below)

Holy Week Schedule

- April 5 at 11:00 AM – Palm Sunday Mass (from Bishop Wall’s chapel)
Remainder from Sacred Heart Cathedral
- April 9 at 11:00 AM – Chrism Mass
- April 9 at 7:00 PM – Mass of the Lord’s Supper
- April 10 at 3:00 PM – Celebration of the Lord’s Passion
- April 11 at 8:00 PM – Easter Vigil Mass
- April 12 at 11:00 AM – Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Reflections:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Matthew 4: 5-7

Loving heavenly Father, give us faith to endure hardships, peace in our hearts that surpasses human understanding, comfort from knowing that you walk with us and confidence of your love to overcome the uncertainty of our current life. Lord Jesus, put us in your yoke that we may see as you see and work with you for your kingdom here and in the age to come. +Amen

Holy Angels of God, pray for us.

Invoking God's grace on all,

+James Sean Wall

Bishop of Gallup