

Coronavirus Update Diocese of Joliet

April 2, 2020

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Dear Fathers, Deacons and our Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

I. INTRODUCTION

Thanks ever so much for your cooperation and positive, upbeat spirit that you are bringing to your parish and broader community. It is making a difference.

Governor Pritzker has issued another “stay at home” directive which is to be fully implemented in the Diocese of Joliet in our parishes and schools and institutions. It is effective until April 30, 2020.

Our foremost goal at this time is to halt the spread of COVID-19 and return to our normal pastoral ministry and community as soon as is feasible. The way to that objective is to implement safe distancing, working from home, hygiene practices, etc. to cut off the vicious spread of coronavirus. Moreover, we know Our Lord is with us at these times as we yet yearn for his sacramental and community presence. Just think, as we do this for two more weeks, won't we be well along on the path to our objective? Thus, I ask for your full cooperation of what we are trying to achieve by the strict closure of our churches, schools and offices. I pray everyday for patience and a sense of calm generated by the Lord's presence in our hearts.

II. CELEBRATION OF PALM SUNDAY AND THE SACRED TRIDUUM

I acknowledge that the loss of the in-person celebration of Palm Sunday, the Triduum and Easter Sunday is painful for all of us.

However, in order to speed the public recovery, it is advisable to stick to live streaming or some form of technological communication. This is also applicable on a daily basis and encompasses distributing Communion to cars, etc. I applaud the intention but it flies in the face of the best guidance we have received.

a. Livestream Options in the Diocese of Joliet

Individual Parishes: A list of known online/livestream options available at:
<http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org/parishes>

Diocese of Joliet – Cathedral of St. Raymond
Livestream and Previous Broadcasts:
<http://www.youtube.com/DioceseofJolietLL>

Holy Week schedule for the Cathedral is as follows:

Palm Sunday	10:00am
Holy Thursday	5:00pm
Good Friday	3:00pm
Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil ¹	8:00pm
Easter Sunday	10:00am

¹ Individual parishes need not celebrate the Easter Vigil – but should notify parishioners of live streaming availability.

Spanish Options – Semana Santa

Nuestra Señora del Monte Carmelo, Joliet

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Joliet will livestream Holy Week services. The schedule will be available soon at <http://www.ourladymtcarmel.net> and the services can be viewed at <http://www.facebook.com/senoramontecarmelo>.

St. Alexis, Bensenville

St. Alexis in Bensenville will also livestream Holy Week services in Spanish. Visit <http://www.stalexisparish.org> for links to their Facebook and YouTube resources.

b. Updated Instructions and Prayers

In an earlier communication dated March 27th and available at our diocesan website (<http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org/covid19>) instructions for the celebration of Palm Sunday as provided by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Disciplines of the Sacraments was available to you. Since then, please note the following updates and supplements:

i. Palm Sunday

Given the present circumstances, and in line with the recommendation of the Vatican, distribution of palms is to be incorporated on another feast, e.g. Pentecost. Imaginative incorporation into a later feast should ensure a broader distribution and preclude any problems with the “stay at home” directive. Moreover, it can have a powerful effect at a later time.

ii. Good Friday

A special prayer has been proposed for the intercessions on Good Friday by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in conjunction with the coronavirus and is enclosed with this letter.²

iii. Mass in Time of Pandemic

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has developed a Mass formulary in “Time of Pandemic”. The Decree establishing the Mass and the prayers and readings are included with this letter.³

² Enclosed Appendix A: Friday of the Passion of the Lord, English & Spanish, Solemn Intercessions

³ Enclosed Appendix B: Mass in Time of Pandemic (decree, prayers and readings, English & Spanish)

III. SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES

a. Anointing of the Sick and Last Rites

Special guidelines for administering the Anointing of the Sick to COVID-19 patients in danger of death have been prepared for the Diocese of Joliet and are included with this letter.⁴

b. Sacrament of Reconciliation

Our parishioners should be encouraged to confess their venial sins with a sincere Act of Contrition and a promise to avoid sin and those with mortal sin should be encouraged to make a sincere Act of Contrition with a firm determination to confess this sin before a priest soon thereafter. At this time, because of the enormously high risk of contagion, no penance services should be held anywhere (e.g. parking lots, etc.). The full teaching of the Church was made for times such as this. If a penitent with mortal sin should want to confess directly with a priest, arrangements can be made as long as the “stay at home” directives are followed.

I encourage all of our parishes, perhaps deanery-wide, to plan a large, spiritual penance service to be celebrated shortly after the “stay at home” provisions are lifted. I can envision such a gathering being very celebratory and hopefully point us down the road to recovery and be a catharsis for all.

c. First Communion

I encourage all to tentatively plan these celebrations, preferably for late May or June. If necessary, they may have to be rescheduled even then.

d. Confirmations

The Bishop’s schedule has considerable openings in late May and June. It is my intention to reschedule all Confirmations which have been cancelled thus far. Sister Sharon Stola, OSB will be in contact with you promptly once the “stay at home” directives have been lifted to select a mutually agreeable date for the Sacrament.

IV. RESOURCES

There remain some outstanding online and electronic resources for the benefit of the faithful. Among these:

a. Prayers, Meditations and Other Resources Provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

USCCB Coronavirus Homepage: <http://www.usccb.org/coronavirus>

⁴ Enclosed Appendix C: Guidelines for Administering Anointing of the Sick to COVID-19 Patients in Danger of Death

b. Holy Week Services for at Home – Courtesy of Diocese of Gary, Indiana and Diocese of Springfield, Illinois

These are included as Appendix D.⁵

V. REACHING OUT TO PARISHIONERS, THE ELDERLY, THE LONELY AND THE FEARFUL

Perhaps the most impactful activity that can be accomplished is telephone contact by the priest, staff, and volunteer parishioners to:

- The elderly, sick, homebound, lonely and fearful. Connection with this group can be especially beneficial.
- New parishioners, millennials (22-35), minimally involved parishioners

The second category of activity is corporal works of mercy:

- Purchasing and delivering groceries to the homebound
- Yard work and spring preparation of the yard
- Telephone visit and preparation of goodies for the elderly – community building

All of these activities should be undertaken with the safe protection guidelines in mind.

VI. VOLUNTEERING POSSIBILITIES RENDERING SERVICE TO THE BROADER COMMUNITY

a. Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities can use assistance in their ministry with the homeless and very poor. (<https://catholiccharitiesjoliet.org/>)

- Will County – (815) 723-3405
- Grundy and Kendall Counties – (815) 774-4663 x3104
- DuPage County – (630) 495-8008
- Kankakee, Ford, Iroquois Counties – (815) 933-7791

b. Civic Call for Medical Professionals

In the COVID-19 event, Illinois is looking for medically trained individuals to join the fight. Individuals that register here may be potentially contacted to work in a hospital surge or alternative housing setting. (<http://www.IllinoisHelps.net/>)

c. Volunteer Assistance Through Public Agencies

If you are not a medical professional, you can find other volunteer opportunities at <http://www.Serve.Illinois.gov/>.

⁵ Enclosed Appendix D: At-Home Holy Week Documentation from Region VII Dioceses

VII. CLOSING AND ONGOING INSTRUCTIONS

While it is extraordinarily hard for us emotionally and psychologically to close our Churches, apart from the online service involving no more than ten persons in the production of each service, the Churches are to be totally closed (no distribution of Communion, etc.) as well as the offices.

A Pastor of one of the mega-Churches in the Joliet area has died of coronavirus, and the following was reported in the Chicago Tribune, Thursday, April 2, 2020:

“One of those infections was particularly striking. A 52-year-old woman’s infection was linked to her sitting in a seat at church that had been occupied earlier in the day by two tourists who showed no symptoms but later fell ill, investigators said after they reviewed closed-circuit camera recordings of church services.”

Further evidence of intensive contagion is the unbelievable, painful steps to be taken in anointing a coronavirus patient as outlined in another section of this document.

The very best pastoral ministry that we can render our flocks is to close our Churches and offices, provide contact through live streaming, internet, telephone and other technological means available to us. From a Church perspective, this action will lead us to the ‘promised land’ of full recovery and preclude our parishioners from catching the virus owing to their church relationship, which for some could possibly result in death. This “fasting” is what God is asking of them and us at this time.

I close with the assurance of my wholehearted support and prayer. Together, I believe we are essentially doing well. We can begin to envision the end, though at some distance, of this rough patch. But we need to renew our resolve. As the pastoral mystery we are about to celebrate, testifies, The glory of the resurrection follows upon dying to ourselves.

Your brother in Christ,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Joliet

P.S. It goes without saying the enormous gratitude we owe to the members of the Diocese of Joliet who helped extensively with the foregoing and are serving generously and effectively throughout the current crisis.