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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 19, 2020

TO: All Clergy, Religious, Seminarians, Principals, Religious Education Directors
and Diocesan Staff

FROM: Bishop Oscar A. Solis

WHAT: Diocesan Directives and Recommendations on our Pastoral Ministry
in Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Greetings of Christ's peace and love during these challenging times! It has been a week since I decided to suspend all public celebrations of the Holy Mass, other sacraments and church gatherings or events as well as the closure of our schools and offices throughout the diocese in compliance with the directives from the government. It was a very difficult decision, but now we understand better the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic we are facing. Thank you for your understanding, patience and support.

A week has passed and the situation has gotten worse. Some states are into lockdown, business establishments and other public places of gathering have been ordered to close and people are told to stay home to slow down the spread of this deadly disease. In view of this situation, I deem it necessary to offer you some diocesan directives and recommendations so we can faithfully continue our priestly ministry when it is most needed. The People of God needs their shepherds to accompany them during this crisis and to provide their spiritual needs to strengthen their faith and hope in God's love so they can find courage to alleviate their fears.

This is the critical time we are called to be good shepherds and servant leaders after Christ ready for the service of God's people. Although public worship including Mass and church gatherings are suspended, our churches remain open in a limited way for personal visits and private prayers. Most importantly, our priestly ministry continues. We are "NOT ON VACATION" but "ON CALL" to carry on the mission of Christ.

Our unity and solidarity is very critical at this time. The people of God need to experience the presence of God in our life and ministry. Faithful to our vocation, it is essential to lead and guide them closer to God in prayer and faith so that during time of isolation, they will not feel alone and abandoned. They need us to accompany them during these hours of uncertainties that they may experience love, hope and peace in God.

I appeal to your support and collaboration. Let us pray for one another and for all the people we serve: our communities and families especially those in need, the elderly, the sick and vulnerable as well as for government leaders and health care workers. Reach out to one another for fraternal, ministerial and moral support, and share our time and resources to strengthen one another so we can remain faithful to our priestly ministry and in our mission. Most of all, please take care of yourselves and be safe. Do not hesitate to call my office if I can be of help, the Vicar General or Vicar for Clergy for questions or further information. Please know of my prayers for you and ask for yours. **Thank you and blessings to everyone!**

DIOCESAN PASTORAL RESPONSE

In consultation with diocesan leadership, Deans and members of our Priests Council, I offer you our diocesan directives and recommendations to carry out our pastoral ministry and outreach for spiritual, moral and temporal support of the faithful.

LEADERSHIP ROLE: As shepherds of our flock, we should be on the FRONT LINE. The People of God must feel secure that God/Church/ Priests are with them.

1. Be shepherds to our flock and servant leaders who will care for our sheep
2. Convert parishes into Field Hospitals to help the suffering of our faithful and provide them consolation and healing
3. Establish Networking Communications in all parishes throughout the Diocese to connect with each other and share information/resources - Bishop with Deans and Priests Council; Deans with brother priests in their respective deaneries.
4. Carry out our pastoral ministry and social outreach faithfully for the spiritual, moral and temporal support of our parishioners.

I MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

1. Availability of Pastors / Clergy, Deacons, Parish Office Staff to offer and respond to the needs of our flock in time of isolation in order to help them avoid the feeling of abandonment, and alleviate stress and panic.
2. Maintain very limited Church office hours with few staff (rotation basis) to attend to emergency needs and calls.
3. Avoid unnecessary contacts with other people to avoid spreading the disease. Observe social distancing and sanitary practices.
4. Mobilize the community, especially other Parish Leaders such as Pastoral & Finance Councils and other Church Ministers for their assistance and collaboration.
5. Establish networking and organize parish leaders and ministers to help provide outreach to the community
6. Connect and share information to the parishioners and community through possible means: continue printing Parish Bulletin; Parish Website and other ways

II MINISTRY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

1. Live Stream or video tape daily and Sunday Masses without the congregation
2. Share it online through the internet or post it in the parish website and social media such as facebook, you tube, Instagram, etc... You can also access other celebration of Masses in the

television of the Pope from the Vatican, other stations and from the Cathedral of the Madeleine Daily and Sunday Masses in English and Spanish

3. Announce to the parishioners of its availability so that they can participate virtually and receive Spiritual Communion. Provide prayer and explain how to receive Spiritual Communion

Other opportunities for the spiritual nourishment

1. Churches should remain open. Encourage the faithful to make frequent visits to the Church for private and personal prayer. Limit the presence of the faithful to observe social distancing and crowding of more than 10 people. Provide sanitizers, soap in the bathrooms for washing hands, sanitize copies of prayer books and other materials.
2. Attend to the sick, elderly, homebound in case of emergency. If possible and safe, offer the Sacrament of Anointing to those seriously ill and Viaticum or Holy Communion observing government and health care directives. Follow guidelines to protect yourself and the faithful from transmitting or getting infected by the virus. Possibly wear mask, use cotton swabs or cotton balls, and put on gloves for the Anointing of the Holy Oil of the Sick. Then dispose these items properly by burying in the ground or burning.
3. Offer hours of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament some time during the day for personal and private prayer and devotion to make them feel close connection with Christ. Avoid crowding of more than ten people in the Church and maintain strict sanitary practices.
4. Inform the people of your availability for the Sacrament of Reconciliation or individual Confession designating specific times during the day and week, and define place where privacy and social distancing can be strictly observed.
5. Recommend spiritual exercises and other resources. Encourage them to pray privately or with their family at home: teach them about the Liturgy of the Hours and where to access it, the Angelus, Stations of the Cross; Novena, rosary and do it in a family setting.

III LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

1. **All Holy Week, Triduum and Easter Services will be celebrated in parishes and missions privately without the presence of the congregation**
2. Limit number of servers or people to assist you: possible concelebrant, deacon, 2 servers, instrumentalist and cantor or 2-3 member choir to enhance the liturgy.
3. Palm Sunday – if plan to distribute Blessed Palms, figure out how parishioners can pick them up in accordance to the safety and sanitary directives.
4. Clergy Day of Prayer is cancelled and Chrism Mass will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Holy Thursday without the congregation. Holy Oils will be distributed to the Parishes and Missions
5. Rite of Initiation and Confirmations will be postponed. It will resume when we overcome the crisis.
6. Limit opening the Church for parishioners for private prayer and personal devotions: Stations of the Cross, rosary, etc...

7. Provide opportunity for parishioners to participate and receive Spiritual Communion through live streaming or video taping of your private or closed celebration of Mass and services. If your parish has no capability of live streaming or videotaping of these liturgical celebrations, coordinate with other neighboring pastors to concelebrate.
8. Make it available on-line, through diocesan or parish website or other social media.
9. When celebrating private Mass, please refrain from distributing the Holy Communion to your friends or group that happens to be in the Church.
10. Always observe government safety directives sanitary practices if you open the church for private visit and personal prayer of the parishioners.

Please, also note carefully the instructions “Prot N. 153/20” that came out from the Congregation for Divine Worship on March 20, 2020. It appended to this memo in French, English and Spanish. This supersedes the above notes if there are any conflicts.

IV Catholic Schools and Parish Religious Education or Faith Formation

1. All are suspended until Easter and/or until further notice
2. Continued instructions should be provided by teachers and catechists
3. Schedule pick-up of materials in school and Church and designate special place for social distancing and sanitary precautions.

V Financial Issues

1. Compensate all employees and workers accordingly
2. Try to extend and to provide assistances to those in need within your means
3. Find ways to encourage parishioners to continue their financial support of the Church by practicing stewardship and through donations for the maintenance and operation of the Church and to be able to pay salaries of our workers.
4. Addendum: Here is a sample message for every Catholic who cares about his or her parish and wants to support it during these trying times (*“Deacon’s Bench”*)

What will our diocese and parishes do to make ends meet if we have to go for weeks, or even months, without taking up a collection? “I don’t know how we’ll survive this” is a refrain I suspect is being uttered in countless parishes around the country this week. Chances are, our parish will not see a collection basket for many weeks, maybe not until May or June. A lot of parishes like ours are just squeaking by, and we look forward to generous donations during Easter. Those won’t be coming this year.

How will our parish church make it? There are bills to be paid - light, gas, heat, plus payrolls to be met and insurance bills to be paid. Imagine going that long without collection and donations and the paid staff being impacted: the parish secretary, the DRE, the music director, the various people who make the parish run. One simple suggestion for every Catholic and our parishioner who cares about our Church and wants to support it during these trying times is to continue your financial contribution through on-line giving or by sending your Sunday donation envelopes to the church. It’s one way to help keep the lights on, and assure that the parish continues once this crisis is passed.

Please consider taking this small step to express your support of our parish and gratitude to our Church for all the times they have been there for you. Then, whisper a prayer that this cloud over our world will soon be over. May God bless you and reward your generosity with his countless blessings!

****Giving online.** If you haven't done it already: investigate online giving for your parish. Parishes can learn how to establish on-line giving. It's easy to set up, usually by having a monthly donation charged to a credit card. Some programs will automatically deduct it from your savings or checking account. It's safe and secure and gives your parishioners one less thing to have to worry about every week. If you are able, and if your parish offers it, do it now.*

OTHER RESOURCES (courtesy of Fr. John Evans)

Setting up Streaming with you-tube and facebook. There are other services but these two are fan favorites. When setting up your stream, dedicate a user account/channel for the parish. Otherwise, if you use a personal account/channel and get reassigned, the video library will go defunct, or you will have to support it indefinitely from your new assignments, or hand over your personal account to the parish in the end. I recommend youtube over facebook, mostly because there is no login required for viewing and it carries more friendly across most platforms. Facebook requires login.

Youtube Streaming

- Time limit per live stream is 12 hours
- Streams 12 hours or less are saved to your channel and archived for future viewing
- Streams 12 hours or greater are NOT saved and NOT archived. No Future viewing
- Free
- No login required for your viewers
- Introduction for live streaming: Focused on videos and comments only, no broader social networking. But youtube videos can be posted into facebook and websites. Will play more friendly across most platforms
- [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Facebook Streaming

- Time limit per live stream is 8 hours
- Free
- Login required for viewing
- Specification for Streaming
- Stronger social networking platform, with more beyond the videos. Poses more issues with trying to get the video into your website or other platforms.
- [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)

As we all become more proficient with reaching our communities remotely, I encourage you to help one another within your deaneries and to share your streams on your websites and with the diocese. Karin Hurley of the Office of Development and Stewardship volunteered to help coordinate the posting of our videos and live streams for the benefit of the people of the diocese. Stewardship: Time, Talent, Treasure. Might we be good stewards as shepherds of the faithful and be generous with finding new ways of helping with the spiritual needs of the Body of Christ!