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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 25, 2021
TO: All Clergy, Religious, Seminarians, Principals, Diocesan Staff and Religious Education Directors
FROM: Bishop Oscar A. Solis
WHAT: Holy Week Message and Reminders

This weekend, we enter the most sacred event in our Church liturgical year to unite our hearts with Christ and reflect on the Paschal Mystery of our faith. Palm or Passion Sunday marks the beginning of the holiest days when we commemorate the sublime act of sacrifice of Christ. Every year, we retrace His journey from His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to His suffering, death on the cross and glorious resurrection at Easter for the redemption of our sins and to celebrate God's gift of salvation.

Holy Week reminds us not only of the many events and circumstances in our lives. It is an opportunity to reflect and to renew our faith in God and our relationship to one another. I invite the people of God in our diocese to join all the faithful throughout the world to experience the unfolding of these sacred events by participating in the various beautiful liturgical celebrations in our parishes and missions.

We all have been through a lot of trials and uncertainties. Let us give greater meaning to the sufferings and challenges we experience, especially during the pandemic, and lift them up in prayer asking our Lord to be with us and to give us hope. Christ invites us to open our hearts to God's invitation to conversion and reconciliation by lifting our own crosses and following Christ that we may receive his unending blessings.

I thank my brother priests, deacons, women and men religious and lay leaders for your faithfulness to the mission of Christ and appreciate your commitment to the service of our Church during these difficult times. Likewise, I am grateful to all the parishioners for your understanding and continued generous support of our diocese. Your faith and love for God and for our clergy provided us hope and inspiration to await the dawning of new light and life that this Easter brings.

COVID-19 is still around us and the infection remains a danger to our lives, health, safety, and wellbeing of our community. I reiterate the importance of the Diocesan directives to all pastors and clergy and their implementation. **Please apply abundant caution: use prudence, common sense, and pastoral discretion to make our Church and parish facilities safe places to worship together as one faith family, to encounter the presence of God and experience the love of Christ in each other.** Your cooperation, reservoir of patience and understanding are essential. With unwavering trust in God and our unity and solidarity in charity, may the Lord bless us with a Holy Week and a Happy Easter!

REMINDERS: *Diocesan Guidelines for Holy Mass, Liturgical Services and Catholic Schools during COVID-19*

Thank you for your fidelity to our pastoral ministry and cooperation in a constantly changing situation over the course of the pandemic. I am aware that my decisions have not always been easy for pastors or the lay faithful to accept. However, they were taken to ensure that the sacred mysteries are celebrated in the most reverent way possible for our parish churches and missions while respecting the safety, public health and the common good.

Our Diocesan protocols remain during this year's celebration of Holy Week and Easter. **However, modified adjustments are allowed to certain aspects of the liturgy considering the current varying situations and changes in local, county and state health department directives.** While we wait for the new State Directives expected to be announced by Governor Spencer Cox on April 10, 2021, I ask all our pastors and principals to continue to exercise common sense and prudent pastoral discretion in evaluating situations and slowly apply modifications in our practices.

The Diocese of Salt Lake City is taking cautious steps toward life after COVID-19 and eventual return to full public worship. Vigilance and abundant caution remain necessary to prevent a new surge of infections. Therefore,

1. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass in-person on Sundays and Holydays of obligation remains in effect until further notice. Every person should consider carefully if returning to collective worship is the safe and appropriate step for them, at this time.
2. We continue to strongly encourage participation in Holy Week and Easter Liturgical Services where possible in person gatherings, following necessary physical distancing and wearing of masks in the Church are appropriate.
3. Pastors are encouraged to continue livestreaming of Masses and other liturgical services for those who cannot come to Church to participate prayerfully in Mass. People can meditate on the Sunday readings, pray the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet. A Prayer for Spiritual Communion or Communion of Desire can be recited during livestream Mass.
4. Provide hope and solidarity to many in our local communities, including some of the most vulnerable by extending pastoral and spiritual care: Anointing the sick distributing Holy Communion to the homebound, visiting the elderly in a safely manner, and helping those in need.
5. Guide families to participate in the "domestic churches" of their living rooms and join with those who are gathering in their local churches in commemorating the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord this Easter.

6. Continue to practice health hygiene in churches and parish facilities: use of masks, frequent hand sanitizing and physical distancing. Pews and other frequently touched surfaces shall be cleaned or sanitized/disinfected after each Mass or service.
7. Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, and other liturgical services will continue subject to the safety and health assessment from the Diocese according to national and state directives, mindful of the wearing masks and physical distancing allowed.
8. Given the ongoing uncertainty about the public health situation and the gradual lifting of restrictions, it will be necessary for every parish and school to give careful consideration to how the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation can be celebrated in a safe and appropriate manner over the coming months. This includes ensuring that all the necessary catechetical preparations or formations are fulfilled, rigorous risk assessments are undertaken and, where necessary, adding other celebrations to avoid overcrowding the Church and with safe physical distancing.
9. Holy Week and Easter are times when, traditionally, many people ask in a particular way for God's forgiveness and for healing. In a safe way, offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and encourage all the faithful to confidently renew their trust in God's mercy at this sacred time of the year through an Act of Perfect Contrition.
10. Based on possible new national, state, and local directives after Easter, be ready to:
 - a. Allow more gatherings on Church and parish properties with proper safeguards in place and in keeping with the Diocesan directives and state/local health officials. Be ready to cancel these if local circumstances change or require it.
 - b. Holy water may be returned to the fonts based on the pastoral discretion of the pastor and the safety of churchgoers. Holy water fonts are to be emptied and cleaned at least daily.
 - c. Bibles, hymnals, and prayer resources may be returned to church pews.

As our nation emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, be on the lookout for further possible adjustments as circumstances change, hopefully for the better. I reiterate the emphasis for continued caution and rigorous application of our current safeguards in place to ensure the safest possible return to public worship in our Churches.

The joyful message of Easter inspires us to continue to reach out especially to those in greatest need around us currently, and to share the light of Christ around us. Let us look forward to worshipping together in person again as a faith family with more and more of our parishioners in the weeks and months to come.