

MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests; All Parishes
From: Father Robert Hughes, V.G.
Date: March 16, 2020
RE: **CORONA VIRUS DIRECTIVES AND GUIDELINES**

Bishop Sullivan has asked me to send this memo providing directives (that which must be followed) and guidelines (that which may be done) in response to Governor Murphy's press conference outlining the New Jersey response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

CURFEW – While Governor Murphy does not call it a curfew, he has restricted all travel on New Jersey roadways from 8:00 PM until 5:00 AM each day, beginning tonight, until further notice. All businesses are to cease operation by 8:00 PM each night. Parishes, therefore, are directed to cancel any activities that cannot be concluded by 8:00 PM or which traditionally begin after that hour until further notice.

MASSES – As you are aware, Bishop Sullivan has already dispensed the faithful from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass. In accord with the Governor's directive to limit gatherings to no more than fifty people, Bishop Sullivan now directs that all public weekday and Sunday Masses be suspended beginning no later than Wednesday, March 18, 2020 and until further notice. Public weekday Masses are not to be held even if attendance is fewer than fifty since, generally speaking, it is the older faithful who are most vulnerable who usually attend.

Since the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Christian life, all priests in the Diocese of Camden must celebrate Mass privately for the good of the Christian faithful entrusted to their care and in satisfaction of the intentions of those who have made an offering for Mass.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS:

Baptism – the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism may take place as long as the attendance at each celebration is limited to fifty. This may require parishes to schedule several individual baptisms on a given Sunday.

Penance – since confessions are held individually, times may be scheduled as the pastor sees fit for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. Lenten Penance Services are to be cancelled.

Confirmation – Father Rocks will reach out to each individual parish in regard to the administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation during the month of March. In keeping with restrictions on the size of gatherings, the celebrations will be restricted to confirmandi, sponsors and parents. Please wait for further instructions from the Bishop's Office.

Anointing of the Sick – priests who are requested to provide the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick should do so with due consideration to the precautions in place at an individual's home, nursing home or hospital. The celebration of the last Sacraments and Viaticum should take place as needed.

Marriage – pastors should discuss with couples whose weddings are scheduled in March and April. Great pastoral care needs to be taken as some venues may have already reached out to couples to impose restrictions or to cancel their receptions. A wedding ceremony or Mass may be celebrated but attendance should be restricted to no more than fifty persons.

FUNERALS – funeral liturgies with or without Mass may be celebrated in the parishes of the Diocese with due regard to the Governor's mandate to limit the gathering to no more than fifty persons. Every pastoral effort is to be made in communicating this to families at what is already a difficult time.

ADORATION – pastors are encouraged to expose the Blessed Sacrament for a period of time each day so that the faithful may come, pray and unite themselves in spiritual communion with the Lord. The hours of adoration should be posted at the Church and on the parish website. A reminder about social distancing should also be posted.

LENTEN SCRUTINIES – Bishop Sullivan hereby dispenses the Elect of the Diocese of Camden from the remaining scrutinies that are to be celebrated at Sunday Masses. A plan for the final preparation of the Elect for the Easter Sacraments needs to be made at parishes in case the restriction on the celebration of Mass is lifted before Easter. More information will be forthcoming.

DIOCESAN RESPONSE ASSISTANCE:

Diocesan Staffing – at the present time, the Bishop intends to keep the diocesan offices open. That may change due to the number of employees we have in each building. Regardless, essential offices such as the Bishop’s Office, Finance Office, Communications Office, Human Resource Office and Internet Technology Office will be operational.

Schools – as you are already aware, the Schools of the Diocese of Camden have been closed until further notice. Teachers are working with online and home instruction so as to keep students engaged in meaningful learning.

Parish Staffing – with the reduction of activity at every parish, pastors will need to determine how best to handle parish staffing. In most cases the number of employees does NOT warrant any closure or working from home as social distancing can be accomplished with reasonable accommodations. Financial safeguards need to be in place – the counting of the collection must take place in the parish offices with due regard to diocesan protocols.

Parish Religious Education Programs – most parishes have a policy that closes religious education when the local public school district is closed. If this is not the case in your parish, all face to face religious instruction must be discontinued until further notice. Parish catechetical leaders should provide resources to families so that religious instruction may continue at home during this time.

LIVE STREAMING OF THE MASS – the Office of Communications is currently developing a list of those parishes that live stream Mass and which will be encouraged to do so daily and on Sunday. If your parish provides a live streaming of the Mass – please contact Michael.walsh@camdendiocese.org. We are also in the process of live streaming a Mass with the Bishop on Sundays.

LIVE STREAMING OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS – the Office of Communications will also develop a live stream of the Stations of the Cross on Fridays. If your parish already does so, please contact Michael.walsh@camdendiocese.org.

PARISH OUTREACH – pastors should find ways of communicating with parishioners on a regular basis during this time of crisis. Providing prayer lines; social media gatherings; regular information and such can help people, many of whom may feel isolated. Pastors should also work with their staff members to develop a plan for welcoming people back to church and to Mass after this disruption in their routine. If this goes on for the full eight weeks, as recommended by the CDC, many will have become accustomed to missing Mass while others will truly come to realize what they are missing.

CARE FOR PRIESTS – in this time, priests must be vigilant about their own health. Eating right, getting exercise and sleep are important to avoiding Covid-19. The Diocese is working to provide testing for priests who may be more susceptible due to the number of people they encounter. More information will be provided when it becomes available. In the meantime, priests should consult with their own doctor should they feel unwell.

HOLY WEEK AND SACRED TRIDUUM – any decisions in regard to the celebration of Holy Week, the Chrism Mass and the Sacred Triduum will be made as we monitor the situation. Pastors and parishes will be notified in due time.

Please note that this is a fluid situation. None of us knows how long the restrictions imposed on New Jersey residents will be in effect. Please be patient and look for regular updates from my office. Thank you in advance for all you do and don't hesitate to contact me if you have a question or concern.