



Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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March 18, 2020

Dear Pastors and People of God,

The spread of COVID-19 in our province and around the world is a matter of deep concern for everyone in our community. Our primary concern must, and always be to care for the spiritual, physical, and mental health and well-being of our fellow parishioners and citizens.

To ensure this, we rely upon our expert medical professionals to provide us with accurate up-to-date information to guide, and protect all of us with the directives they deliver. I have full confidence in the direction given to our province by British Columbia Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

On Monday, Dr. Henry set the limit for group gatherings to a maximum of only 50 people. Asking parishes to limit the number of parishioners coming for Mass to that number (many of whom are seniors) would not be practical or manageable. Therefore, I have made the very difficult decision that effective immediately and until further notice, I am putting in place throughout the Diocese of Victoria the following:

1. All weekend and weekday Masses, including Sunday Celebrations of the Word are cancelled until further notice.

For the duration of this period, I grant to all the Catholic faithful, dispensation from their Sunday obligation. I know that the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is the very heart of our Catholic life, and the inability to gather for this worship is a cause of great suffering. Let us accept this as our duty at this time, and offer this moment in sacrifice to God for the sake of all who are ill from the COVID-19 virus.

In these extraordinary circumstances, I encourage everyone to participate remotely in the celebration of the Eucharist by tuning in to daily Mass on Vision TV, or online at dailytvmass.com.

2. All Parish Penitential celebrations are cancelled.

3. Priests will continue to respond, upon request, to people in the hospital or at home who are gravely ill.

4. All celebrations of Baptism, First Reconciliation, Confirmation, and First Eucharist, are postponed.

Once the Provincial Health Officer has advised that the pandemic has ended, I shall grant to our Pastors any necessary Delegation to enable them to celebrate these Sacraments at the times they themselves will determine in consultation with parents, and guardians.



5. Funerals may continue to be celebrated in our churches.

In consultation with the relatives of the deceased, the Priest Celebrant will determine if participation needs to be limited to family members, so as to be in compliance with prevailing medical directives. **No receptions following the funeral liturgy should take place.**

6. Marriages may continue to be celebrated in our churches.

In consultation with the couple, the Priest Celebrant will determine how to limit the attendance of family members and others in compliance with prevailing medical directives. Marriage Preparation courses have been cancelled until further notice. As such, **Pastors will work with couples to fulfill the required preparations individually.**

7. Parishes that normally keep their churches open during the day may retain this practice.

In this way, especially during this uncertain and extraordinary time, we want to offer the assurance that the Church remains close to you and is ready to accompany you through this, or any difficulty.

8. The Chrism Mass will be canceled, along with all Holy Week and Easter Liturgies.

In addition:

1. Parishes will continue to take extra precautions to sanitize and disinfect their facilities.
2. All surfaces are to be washed with germ-killing agents.
3. Continue enhanced cleaning protocols in all high risk 'hand-touch' areas that require more frequent wiping and sanitization.
4. Frequent, daily communications and updates are to be shared and discussed with all parish groups and ministries.

All other Liturgical Directives that I have communicated to the Diocese in earlier Memo updates from March 5, 2020 onwards remain in place. For the most updated information please go to: <https://www.rcdvictoria.org/diocesan-blog/responsetocovid19>

We continue to pray for the rapid end to the COVID-19 virus, for those who are ill or have died, and for their families. May the Lord also bless all those who continue to work fearlessly on the frontlines of this pandemic.

In Communion,

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria