



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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March 17, 2020
Commemoration of Saint Patrick

My dear brother priests, pastoral administrators and all my brothers and sisters in Christ:

Yesterday, March 16, 2020, I issued a Statement announcing that all public Masses in our Diocese have been suspended due to the ongoing threats, sickness and deaths created by the Coronavirus. I am united in prayer with all of you, especially the sick, the poor and all suffering personally from the devastating effects of this pandemic. Added to this suffering was the need to suspend public Mass. As you know, I have emphasized continually the importance of attending weekly Mass and nurturing devotion to the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. I have asked our priests to celebrate Holy Mass daily without the presence of the faithful in order to offer the Church's most perfect prayer, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, for all entrusted to their pastoral care. Since my Statement yesterday, March 16, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the White House have further tightened their advice that no groups of more than 10 should assemble, down from 50, noting that "even if you are young, or otherwise healthy, you are at risk and your activities can increase the risk for others."

Subsequent to the Diocese of Rochester's *Memorandum regarding COVID-19, the Coronavirus Disease of March 12, 2020*, and my Statement referenced above on the suspension of public Masses in the Diocese of Rochester due to the same disease, I now provide an update on several areas of diocesan life. Priests are to be available for sacramental ministry, especially sacramental emergencies, while also maintaining the necessary public health precautions, understanding that while they could contract the disease, they also could unknowingly communicate the disease without proper care. Prudence and caution are the guiding principles, while never failing to pray for the sick at the daily, non-public Masses.

The Sacraments:

Baptism: "Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks." (CIC, c. 867, §1). Any celebration of Baptism is to be limited to parents and godparents and not to exceed 10 persons in attendance; proper social distancing is to be observed by those attending the ceremony. Only fresh water is to be used for Baptisms; baptismal fonts are to be cleansed before and after every Baptism.

Holy Mass/First Holy Communion: In order to limit the rapid spread of the Coronavirus, COVID-19, all public Masses in the Diocese of Rochester are suspended until further notice, effective March 16, 2020. The federal, state and local government have indicated that it is not possible to know when this pandemic will subside, so the cancellation or rescheduling of these ceremonies cannot be determined at this time. More guidance will be provided in the future.

Confirmation: It is now realistic to expect that the scheduled celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation may all be rescheduled as the restrictions continue to be given. Additional information will be forthcoming from the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis about rescheduled Confirmation ceremonies. While preparation for the reception of the Sacrament is encouraged to continue privately at home, noting the extraordinary reality of this pandemic,

pastoral accommodations should be made to the diocesan requirements as described in The Diocese of Rochester's *Policies for the Administration of the Sacraments*. (Cf. Number 3 and Addendum 5).

R.C.I.A.: The celebrations of the scrutinies for the Members of the Elect in parishes are suspended.

Holy Week and the Triduum: The federal, state and local government have indicated that it is not possible to know when this pandemic will subside, but it is realistic to expect that the Holy Week ceremonies will be celebrated without the faithful present and the conferral of the Sacraments at Easter Vigil will take place at a later date. More information will follow, particularly how the Sacraments of Initiation can be administered in a timely and safe manner. Information will be forthcoming about live streaming these ceremonies.

The Chrism Mass: It is likely that we will continue to be restricted by crowd size when the Chrism Mass is scheduled to occur. While the faithful may not be present, the Mass would occur without the presence of the faithful and the oils will be blessed and consecrated at a non-public Mass and distributed as feasible. Information will be forthcoming about live streaming this ceremony.

Weddings and Funerals: At this time, funerals and weddings, distinct from other ceremonies, may be celebrated; however, no more than 50 people may be in attendance in accord with the State of New York's March 16, 2020 limit on crowd capacity, and strictly following the precautions previously stated by the Diocese of Rochester on March 12, 2020. Further restrictions may change these guidelines as we go forward. Also, the *Funeral Liturgy outside Mass* and the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass* may be celebrated, as necessary. Noting the extraordinary reality of this pandemic, pastoral accommodations should be made for couples participating in Pre-Cana programs; an online program also is available through the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis.

Confession/Reconciliation: The Sacrament of Confession is a great comfort in times of uncertainty. Priests are to use only those spaces that have a screen with a cloth separating the priest and the penitent as much as possible, to prevent airflow. If this is not feasible, priests are to move to a larger space and set up a screen as described above, preserving discretion. Confessions must be made individually and may never be heard via social media or by telephone. While the *Day of Penance and Mercy* is cancelled, priests should regularly be available for Confessions, and as requested.

Anointing the Sick: Pastoral care to Catholics in hospitals, nursing homes and other healthcare facilities will be governed by their protocols set by health professionals. If the person is under quarantine or diagnosed with Coronavirus, proper attire will be provided and must to be worn, including gloves, goggles, an N-95 rated mask, and protective gown. Anointing of the Sick in homes should proceed with caution, maintaining as much as possible social distancing (6 feet), except for the actual anointing. A mask and gloves are now considered ordinary procedure by healthcare professionals. In accord with the *Code of Canon Law*, "the priest is to anoint with his own hand;" however, because of the higher risk of contagion or infection, "the use of an instrument" is permitted. (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 1000). This may be a single use of a ball of cotton that touches the oil only once and is then disposed of in a reverent manner by burying or burning. Touching surfaces should be limited and hands should be washed immediately with hand sanitizer.

Other items:

Church Access: Churches will remain accessible for private prayer, pending further regulations and as feasible in local situations, at the discretion of the pastor/administrator. If a parish has perpetual or regularly scheduled periods of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, this should occur in a space large enough to maintain the recommended distance of 6 feet between adorers.

Pastoral visits to shut-ins: Such visits can be carried out by telephone, conscious that visitors could be asymptomatic and easily bring illness or the Coronavirus with them. If a visit is necessary for a priest to bring the Sacraments, it is recommended that an approved mask be worn. Touching surfaces should be limited and hands should be washed immediately with hand sanitizer.

Diocesan Pastoral Center: Access to the Pastoral Center is restricted to employees, who remain accessible by email and telephone. It is kindly asked that business that is not urgent be postponed.

Streamed Mass on Sunday, March 22, 2020 at 11:00 a.m.: Through the kindness of Saint John of Rochester Parish, Fairport, I will offer this Sunday's Mass, the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2020, which will be streamed at 11:00 a.m., and accessible via www.dor.org. The diocesan website will redirect you to the live feed. I look forward to this opportunity to offer Mass for the faithful. I hope you are able to access the site, allowing us to pray the Church's most perfect prayer as a diocesan family.

I again encourage all Catholics and all God's people to continue to pray for the community, especially those who are sick and for the most vulnerable, for our medical community and our government and health leaders who are guiding us in this emergency. Please also remember those whose lives have been otherwise disrupted, especially anyone who has lost income from a loss of work during this difficult time. May Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician, grant us health and bring us to a resolution of this universal pandemic. May Mary, Our Mother, protect us, may Saint Patrick and Saint Joseph intercede for us.

Assuring you of my continued prayers, longing with you for the peace of the Risen Christ, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Salvatore R. Matano*
The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester

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The Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.