



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Coronavirus Update, Suspension of Mass and Public Gatherings

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Yesterday, I was on a phone conference with the governor's office and faith leaders around the state related to the COVID-19 /Coronavirus pandemic. Doctor Anne Zink, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer, predicts significant spreading of the virus over the next several weeks in the state. She acknowledged the moral conflict that significant social changes to combat the virus pose, especially for faith communities. This is a serious situation that requires our community as a whole to make significant changes to minimize the threat.

It is with this in mind that, effective March 18, the public celebration of Mass and other parish activities is suspended until April 3, at which time we will re-evaluate the situation. This includes all public liturgies, Masses, Benediction, Stations of the Cross, communal penance services, faith formation classes, and other types of communal church activities.

While I am taking the extraordinary step of dispensing Catholics from their Sunday/Holy Day obligation to Mass, it is important to remember that we are still expected to "keep holy the Sabbath." The faithful are reminded that while we may not gather together for the Sacrifice of the Mass, individuals and families should pray the readings of the day and offer a spiritual communion asking for the grace to receive Christ with humility as did our Blessed Mother, Mary. We will be working on a way to stream the private celebration of Mass via our diocesan website and other social media outlets.

I realize that the inability to attend Mass is an enormous sacrifice. For our communities that have the benefit of regular celebration of the Mass and other Sacraments, this offers an opportunity for us to be spiritually united with our brothers and sisters in remote communities throughout the diocese and the world who go weeks or months without the benefit of the Sacraments. This should create within all of us a holy longing to receive our Lord and Savior in the Eucharist and a renewed reverence for Christ physically present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Parishes are encouraged to open their church buildings for individual prayer while maintaining social distancing and other precautionary measures that health officials have recommended to minimize the threat.

This is a difficult decision for me to make, but I believe it is important for the health and safety of our communities. Every Mass I offer during this crisis will include a specific intention for the health and well-being of you and your families and an end to this pandemic. Please join me in this prayer intention. May our hunger for the Eucharist and the other Sacraments be a source of grace for us.

Sincerely in Christ,

†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
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