



BISHOP OF GARY

March 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As a diocese, we have been actively monitoring the public health response to the Coronavirus. As the situation continues to change, I have some very painful news to share with you. Based upon the recommendations of public health experts and in solidarity with the bishops of Indiana, effective Wednesday March 18, I am **temporarily suspending all public weekday and weekend Masses in the Diocese of Gary** until further notice.

The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. In the Eucharist, we receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The decision to temporarily suspend the public celebration of the Mass was not taken lightly. The spiritual resources of the Church will still be made available, but will be provided within the context of the current health crisis.

At the discretion of pastors, **churches may be open for private prayer so that you can approach Our Lord who is truly present in the Tabernacle.** Whenever the church remains open, it is the responsibility of the pastor (or the one who he designates) to ensure that the number of attendees adheres to guidelines given by the Centers for Disease Control and the Indiana Department of Public Health. Everyone should become familiar with the protocols concerning social distancing, vulnerable populations, and cleaning which are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov).

Funerals and baptisms are at the discretion of the pastor but must adhere to the guidelines outlined above by the CDC. Individual confessions, anointings, viaticum, and other forms of pastoral care can be offered in a case-by-case basis. Consult your local parish for any of these needs during this time. Communal penance services are cancelled.

While the Sunday Mass will not be publicly offered during this time, the obligation to keep the Lord's Day holy remains. On this day, we should seek to refrain from work, increase our love of the Lord and extend charity to others through prayer and service. Additional spiritual and devotional practices can be found on our website (www.dcgary.org). Daily readings can be found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org).

Please remain connected to our diocesan website for updates. There you will also find the opportunity to register to receive up-to-date information from the diocese and local parishes. Many of our parishes currently offer web streaming of Masses. We will include links on our website to help connect you with these videos, as well as information regarding how you can find Masses offered on television and through websites.

As you temporarily participate at Mass by remote viewing, you and your families are encouraged to make a daily Spiritual Communion by praying:

**My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love you above all things and I desire to receive you in my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,
Come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already there
And unite myself wholly to you.
Never permit me to be separated from you.
Amen.**

The experience of Lent 2020 will be unlike any other. As so many of our routines are disrupted – we should respond by re-assessing our lives and making sure that we have responded fully to Jesus. I pray that we will find new ways to support and love each other.

The Lord can bring great good out of this, as we intensify our prayer, turn our hearts over to Jesus, and share that love with others. As I mentioned in my letter last week, we live in a time in which “social distance” may be necessary as a health precaution, but this does not have to result in “spiritual distance.” During this time, more than any other, we should seek to proclaim Jesus as our Lord – and ourselves as your servants for the sake of Jesus.

I once again entrust and consecrate our diocese to Our Lady of Lourdes. The Blessed Mother intercedes for us to her son Jesus. Let us pray for her continued intercession during these days, for healing and comfort to those who are suffering.

Jesus, I trust in you...

Your Servant,
The Most Reverend Robert J. McClory
Bishop
Diocese of Gary