



+March 24, 2020

Dear Priests and Parish Leadership,

Peace be with you. During this unusual time we must be ever more committed in our efforts to bring Christ to the people and the people to Christ. As Pope Francis encourages us:

"Be very close to the people of God, make each one feel loved and accompanied, help everyone to perceive that the Church does not close its doors to anyone, but is concerned that no little one risks life or is forgotten."

As most of you know, Governor Inslee issued a new "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order, which essentially asks all Washingtonians to shelter in place, bans all gatherings and closes all non-essential businesses. This ban goes into effect end of day Wednesday, March 25, and remains in place until midnight on April 8, with the possibility of an extension.

Out of love for our neighbors and our desire to help slow the spread of the virus, the governor's order requires us to make further changes to how we operate and minister. At the same time, we must continue to care for the spiritual needs of our parishioners by making ourselves available to them for pastoral visits and calls, providing online resources, and livestreaming Mass. Below is an outline of these key changes.

Parish Offices

The governor's order requires us to close our parish offices. As we shared last week, all parish staff should be exploring work from home options to help keep the essential business activities going, such as payroll and bill pay.

Based on the order, it is permissible to "carry out minimum basic operations (as defined in Section 3(d) of this Order) for a non-essential business." This means that each parish can certainly have a staff member visit the office weekly to handle mail, bill pay, payroll, etc., if these functions cannot be performed remotely. If any parish foresees an inability to accomplish essential business operations, please reach out to Scott Bader in Parish Financial Services.

Pastors and parish leaders should maintain regular contact with their parish staffs to ensure personal support and coordination of ministry efforts.

Churches Can Be Open for Prayer

We need to ensure that the faithful are able to visit the sacred space of the church for private prayer. The decision to open the church for private prayer is up to the pastor's discretion. In order to open the doors of the church, it is absolutely necessary that the following requirements are met:

- A non-vulnerable individual (staff member or volunteer) must be present any time the church is open. This may require a new schedule where the church is only open a few hours a day, or only on certain days of the week.
- This individual must ensure proper social distancing and must properly sanitize areas that have been touched by parishioners.

If these requirements cannot be met, then the church should direct parishioners to other local Catholic churches that can facilitate this environment. This may require parishes to work together to ensure parishioners have a place to pray on a regional basis.

Please ensure your parishioners know the schedule and location so they can visit a Catholic church for private prayer.

Adoration and "Priest Availability" Schedule

Please note that hours for public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (exposition) cannot be published since such an action would constitute an "event" and potentially draw people from their homes (in opposition to the governor's order). Instead, we will publicize the hours the church is open for private prayer.

Similarly, we can no longer publicize hours in which a priest is available at the church for pastoral or sacramental needs. Instead, we must make it very clear to parishioners how they can reach a pastor for such needs or for a pastoral emergency. Please be sure parishioners know how to reach their priest and schedule an appointment (e.g., confession or anointing) if needed. We recommend posting this on your website and sending it through your email newsletter. Priests who do not wish to give out their personal cellphone information may want to consider getting an inexpensive "pay as you go" phone for this purpose.

Livestreaming Mass and Online Resources

We encourage parishes to livestream daily and Sunday Mass and share online faith resources with your parishioners. This will help your community stay connected and fuel the spiritual needs of your people.

However, this new order means that the non-public Mass must now be a private Mass with one priest and one person supporting with the camera. This Mass may take place in the church, or in a pastor's private chapel provided the space fulfills all liturgical norms. Previously permitted non-public Masses of less than 10 people are no longer allowed.

There are several resources listed on the homepage of the archdiocesan website. Please note that several of the top Catholic publishers are now offering their resources free of charge to help Catholics grow in their faith in the midst of this challenge. These resources ensure that you can continue to evangelize and disciple your parishioners even in the absence of public Sunday Mass.

Anointing and Visiting the Homebound

The governor's order has little effect on our practice of anointing the sick and visiting the homebound, which is an essential ministry that we will continue. Priests must practice an abundance of caution in such circumstances. Please refer to the previously published guidelines for making pastoral and sacramental visits to the homebound.

Food Banks

Many of our parishes operate food banks or food services for people in our communities, which is deemed essential in the governor's order. Therefore, we recommend that parishes continue this important part of our ministry. However, any parish worker or volunteer cannot be a vulnerable person. Each parish will need to access willing volunteers who are not vulnerable to keep food banks operational during this time. Please see the previously published guidelines for sanitization and social distancing when providing these ministries.

Baptisms and Weddings

This order requires us to postpone all gatherings including weddings and baptisms. The only exception would be for a private baptism when there is a grave danger of death.

Funerals and Cemeteries

Based on the order, all funerals will be postponed. We recommend waiting to schedule a memorial Mass with the family once the ban has been lifted. Similarly, our cemeteries will be closed for burial ceremonies at this time.

Construction Projects

This new order requires us to halt any non-essential construction projects. The only construction that may continue are projects that improve public health or impact the safety of a structure. In many cases, we will find that construction crews have already temporarily paused work. If you have any questions about your own construction project, please reach out to Ed Foster in Property and Construction.

Modification to Sacred Triduum Gatherings of Priests

The governor's order intends to reduce unnecessary contact between people from different households. Therefore, priests are now discouraged from concelebrating the Sacred Triduum with priests from other parishes.

Holy Week Resources for Families

Please know that various chancery offices are working together to provide resources for your parishioners to assist them in a faithful and fruitful experience of Palm Sunday and the Sacred Triduum. These resources are forthcoming and will be issued in time for these liturgies. Watch for this information and be ready to pass it on to your families.

Priest Travel

Priests are permitted to travel for ministry needs. This includes pastoral and sacramental visits to homes as well as to the parish church.

Again, thank you for your dedication to the people of God, especially during this challenging time. I'd like to close today's letter with words from Pope Francis:

"Let's pray that the Holy Spirit give pastors the capacity for pastoral discernment, so they find measures that don't leave the holy faithful people of God alone, so the people of God feel accompanied by their pastors and draw comfort from the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer."

Thank you for your diligence in these matters.
With every best wish and an assurance of prayer, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

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Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg

Prayer to Our Lady of Seattle



Holy Mary, we come before you as spiritual children in great need, seeking your intercession, and asking that your mantle of love surround us to console, protect, and lead us to your son Jesus.

We entrust all of God's family, especially the church in Western Washington, into your immaculate hands. With your son Jesus' gentle power you can *undo any knot* in our church, and in the lives of believers who entrust themselves to your care.

Today I especially entrust to you [*mention request/ Coronavirus here*], and I ask that — through your intercession, and that of St. James, our guardian angels, and the faithful in our archdiocese — we may be free from every spiritual and temporal ill, and be safely led to encounter your son's merciful, sacred heart.

Our Lady of Seattle, Undoer of Knots, pray for us!