

30 April 2020

To the Faithful of the Diocese of Fargo:

The COVID-19 health crisis has led to extraordinary measures being taken throughout the world. As Catholics, we have a serious responsibility, not only in charity, but in justice, to prevent the spread of this disease to those who are most vulnerable. On March 17, 2020, I made the difficult decision to cancel public celebrations of the Mass, other sacraments, and parish events for a limited time.

After consulting with experts, I judge that provided we diligently observe the safety protocols which I elaborate below, we can reasonably resume the public celebration of the Mass and other sacraments beginning on May 4. I am grateful for the patience and cooperation of the faithful during this difficult time without the ability to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist, and I once again call upon their good will to observe the guidelines listed below for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for the entire community.

Therefore, effective Monday, May 4, the following directives are to be observed throughout the Diocese of Fargo *until further notice*:

- The faithful are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass.
 - Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 and those exposed to someone with COVID-19 should follow quarantine guidance from medical professionals.
 - Those who are at higher risk from COVID-19 (i.e. those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) are strongly encouraged to stay home. If they have spiritual needs, they should contact their parish priest.
 - Anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to the church for a visit or for any public liturgies or activities.
- The Diocese of Fargo will continue to livestream Masses for the good of those who cannot attend.
- In accord with current public health recommendations, the faithful should practice good hand hygiene, washing their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, or using an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- In accord with current public health recommendations, the faithful should wear cloth face coverings when they come to church. Please remember that face coverings are not just for one's own protection, but also for the protection of others. (See [CDC recommendations on face coverings](#).) Children under 2 years of age are not recommended to wear a face covering.

- Federal and state guidelines for strict physical distancing will be observed, namely, the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other at all times.
 - Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other, but will need to practice it with those who are not members of their household.
 - The 6-foot distance should be maintained not only in the pews, but in all spaces within the church complex.
- In order to follow guidelines for physical distancing the number of persons admitted to each church at any given time will be limited.
- Because the virus seems to be spread largely by dispersion of respiratory droplets, and vigorous singing tends to produce such droplets, congregational singing and singing in choirs is not allowed.
- Although the faithful are entitled to receive Holy Communion either on the tongue or in the hands, in order to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus, the extraordinary measure will be taken of only receiving Holy Communion in the hand. For this to have its intended effect, however, the faithful must practice good hand hygiene.
- These directives are subject to change, depending on the development of the COVID-19 health crisis.

I am confident that the return to the public celebration of the Mass will be an occasion of great joy for the faithful of our diocese. Following these directives during the celebration of the Mass will feel strange, as it should, since they are extraordinary measures only adopted out of necessity. Nevertheless, our Lord, Jesus Christ, is always present in the Church's liturgical celebrations, most especially in the Eucharist. The awkwardness of the current situation need not distract us from his presence, nor prevent us from receiving him with open and eager hearts. And may our renewed encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist fill us with his charity, that we may in turn love and care for our brothers and sisters.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo

Very Rev. Andrew Jasinski
Chancellor