

Dear Friends in Christ:

On Tuesday afternoon, April 7, the pastors of the Diocese received an update from Bishop Kettler. I share with you the Bishop's decision that *public Masses will not resume until at least May 15*.

While this is of course disappointing, especially in the Easter season, I understand the need to continue to "flatten the curve." Through involvement with St. Cloud Hospital, I regularly hear the medical and public health side of this concern, and the peak surge for COVID-19 infection is expected around mid-May; some even project into June. We have had success in slowing the spread of the virus, and it is important not to lose that momentum to allow preparations to continue so we can avoid if possible the tragic outcomes we have seen in New York, New Jersey, Italy, Spain, and elsewhere in our nation and world.

It seems counterintuitive to be doing something vital by doing "nothing" – but as Bishop Kettler notes, slowing or preventing the spread of this virus is itself an active work of charity and respect for life.

Note that these are not new restrictions, just their extension for a longer time. If circumstances with the virus change, this timeframe may also change ... we are learning flexibility.

Along with this ongoing suspension of public celebration of Masses, Bishop Kettler's directives mean that for the present and at least until mid-May:

- our parish offices and buildings will remain closed to the public. Please call or email with parish business; our staff are working from home or in the office as needed
- the Adoration chapel remains closed, and Holy Hours and other individual and group prayer will continue to be observed at home
 - Confirmation will be rescheduled by the Bishop some time after May
- First Communion are also postponed; we will let families know as soon as we can on alternative dates but certainly not until after May 15
 - funeral Masses remain prohibited, with graveside services taking place for now and Memorial Masses to be scheduled after restrictions are lifted
 - Baptisms are to be rescheduled to a later date as well
- weddings already scheduled may take place without a Mass and with less than ten people present

- confession is available by appointment only. To allow us to schedule other responsibilities, we will be designating specific times that confessors will be available for appointments. Please watch for further information after Easter
- the Divine Mercy Sunday observance in our area, normally at St. Mary's Cathedral, will be offered online (a link will be posted when available)

Regarding finances: along with our schools, our parishes are applying for the various provisions of the CARES Act that are advantageous and open to non-profits. We will do all we can to support our valued staff, meet our financial responsibilities, control our costs, and emerge intact from this challenging time.

Thank you most sincerely for your faithful financial contributions during this time. As you will see in our online bulletins, many continue to support the parishes through the mail. I know that stamp and trip to the mailbox are added steps but it is very much appreciated!

Regarding parish life: this extension will mean that we will need to continue to find creative ways to keep our parish connections and ministries functioning. We will be convening virtual meetings with our staff and our Pastoral Councils soon to discuss this.

We will continue to livestream our daily Masses and offer occasional programs to engage those interested in various topics. We are brainstorming.

One other change: due to circumstances beyond our control, the 8:30 a.m. Easter Sunday Mass will not be livestreamed. The 10:30 a.m. Mass on Easter will be livestreamed.

This is hard, but above all, please know that Fr. Greg, Deacon Frank, and I pray daily for each of your households, along with our nation and our world. It sounds a bit hollow to say "we're here for you" when so much is closed down, postponed, or simply not possible right now; but we are truly one Body in Christ. As we enter these most sacred days and share in the victory of Jesus over the power of sin and death, we are reassured once more that the Lord will never fail us.