



DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

P.O. Box 875
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
L2R 6Z4

THE CHANCERY

905-684-0154
Fax: 905-684-2185

MEMO

To: All Clergy/Religious in the Diocese of St. Catharines

From: Bishop Gerard Bergie

Date: April 3, 2020

Re: COVID-19

STAY HOME

This is the urgent message repeatedly emphasized by public health authorities locally and worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic is now present in our community and is escalating. The situation will worsen, and we are told that the next two weeks are critical if we want to “flatten the curve”. We must be serious about our role as leaders, out of love and respect for our community, and not do anything or offer anything that might encourage people to leave their homes, unless absolutely necessary.

CLOSURES AND CANCELLATIONS IN EFFECT UNTIL MAY 30TH

We have already had to close our parish churches to the public. Parish offices and the Catholic Centre remain closed to the public, with staff working from home as much as possible, monitoring phones and email. All parish and diocesan social events and meetings are cancelled.

Special large celebrations including First Communions and Confirmations will be rescheduled.

STAY HOME. This must be our over-riding consideration until further notice.

HOLY WEEK CELEBRATIONS 2020

PALM SUNDAY

Bishop Bergie will preside at all Holy Week celebrations at the Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria. All celebrations will be livestreamed, and accessible on the diocesan website www.saintcd.com, Facebook page www.facebook.com/DioceseofStCatharines, and on the Cathedral website www.thecathedralinstcatharines.com.

- Palm Sunday, 11:30 am
- Chrism Mass (postponed until a later date)
- Holy Thursday, 7:00 pm
- Good Friday, 3:00 pm
- Easter Vigil, 7:00 pm
- Easter Sunday, 11:30 am

Additionally, Easter Sunday Mass will be broadcast on Cogeco TV Channel 10 (www.yourtv.tv/niagara).

The Palm Sunday Mass will begin with the blessing of palms, followed by the proclamation of the Gospel and Solemn Entrance. There is no procession with palms. The liturgy proceeds as usual. Blessed palms are to be available to parishioners at a later date.

We must not encourage people to leave their homes for the purpose of picking up blessed palms or for any other non-essential reason.

For the same reason, for those parishes that have the tradition of blessing Easter baskets on Holy Saturday, it would be best to cancel this event.

TRIDUUM

For all celebrations, it is critical that no laity are present in the church.

HOLY THURSDAY

The foot washing ritual is to be omitted. At the end of Mass, the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the tabernacle. There is no procession.

GOOD FRIDAY

The liturgy proceeds as usual, and is to begin at 3:00 pm.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has issued a votive Mass for this time of pandemic and called for the inclusion of a new prayer in the Good Friday liturgy:

“For the Afflicted in Time of Pandemic”.

Almighty ever-living God,

only support of our human weakness,

look with compassion upon the sorrowful condition of your children

who suffer because of this pandemic;

relieve the pain of the sick,

give strength to those who care for them,

welcome into your peace those who have died

and, throughout this time of tribulation,

grant that we may all find comfort in your merciful love.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Decree: <http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/decreti-generali/decreti-generali/2020/messa-in-tempo-di-pandemia/decretum.html> (page 4 for English, page 6 for French)

<http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/decreti-general/decreti-general/2020/messa-in-tempo-di-pandemia/adnexus.html> (page 8 for English, page 12 for French)

<http://www.cultodivino.va/content/cultodivino/it/documenti/decreti-general/decreti-general/2020/preghiera-universale-venerdi-santo-2020/adnexus.html> (page 4 for English, page 6 for French)

EASTER VIGIL

The lighting of the fire is omitted, and the Vigil may begin before sunset. The procession is omitted. The Paschal Candle is to be lit in the sanctuary. The Exsultet follows and the Vigil Mass proceeds as usual.

Baptisms and receptions into the church are postponed until a later date. Renewal of baptismal promises takes the place of the liturgy of baptism.

EASTER SUNDAY

Special prayers are to be said for those affected by the current pandemic, for our healthcare workers and researchers, for our religious and government leaders, and for the dead.

WEDDINGS

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many couples have had to reschedule their weddings, and some are finding it difficult to make new arrangements. The Diocese has had requests to allow couples to marry on Sunday. In view of the current situation, and the uncertainty of when things might begin to normalize, permission may be granted for weddings (with no Mass) to be celebrated on Sundays. This permission is temporary, until the end of 2020, and will be granted only for weddings that have had to be rescheduled due to COVID-19. Couples are asked to contact their parish priest for more information.
- Officiating priests are to complete Form II, requesting permission for “Other”, noting Sunday wedding. On side two of the Form II, under Remarks and Explanations, provide the originally scheduled date for the wedding, the new date for the wedding, and indicate COVID-19 pandemic as the grave reason for making the request. Please address any questions to Margaret Jong at diocese@saintcd.com.
- If a Sunday wedding is planned while government restrictions on social gatherings are in force, celebrations would include only the officiating priest/deacon, bride, groom, and two witnesses. If parishes have the capability to livestream the event, others could participate remotely.
- Any dispensations already granted for weddings that are now postponed need to be amended and re-issued. Please forward these to the Chancery at the appropriate time.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- The ordinary way of attaining forgiveness for sins is participating in individual and integral confession and absolution. If a person is unable to make an appointment with a priest for the Sacrament during this time, it is sufficient to make a sincere act of contrition and commit to participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible when conditions allow.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not to be made available as a drive-thru or drive-in encounter.

- There will be no permission granted for General Absolution.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

- In the news there have been some distressing stories of people afflicted by COVID-19 dying alone since visitors are not permitted. In the Niagara Region, patients and their loved ones may find great comfort in knowing that all NHS hospital sites (St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls) allow designated priests to anoint gravely ill and dying patients, including COVID-19 patients. This is not the case in other jurisdictions. In our diocese, in addition to Fr. Andy Goodwin (our full-time Chaplain at St. Catharines General Hospital) and myself, five priests have agreed to be available for emergency spiritual care at the three hospitals. All have had specific training for the pandemic protocol. No other priests will be allowed to visit hospitals for the foreseeable future.
- Please visit the diocesan website (www.saintcd.com) for updates on our response to the pandemic, including a list of parishes in the diocese that are livestreaming Masses and other liturgies. There are also prayer resources available.