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Indiana's Catholic Bishops Suspend Public Sunday and Weekday Masses

In light of new information and recommendations from health officials concerning the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency to stem the spread of the virus, the five Catholic bishops of Indiana have suspended effective March 18 and until further notice all public Sunday and weekday Masses throughout the Province of Indiana, which is comprised of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the Dioceses of Gary, Evansville, Fort Wayne-South Bend, and Lafayette.

The Most Reverend Robert J. McClory, Bishop of Gary, sent a letter to the faithful, explaining the decision and offering encouragement during these challenging times.

Bishop McClory noted that the diocese has been actively monitoring the public health response to the Coronavirus. "The decision to temporarily suspend the public celebration of the Mass was not taken lightly," Bishop McClory explained. "The spiritual resources of the Church will still be made available, but will be provided within the context of the current health crisis".

For everyone's sake 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).

Communal penance services are cancelled. Funerals and baptisms are at the discretion of the pastor but must follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC. Individual confessions, anointings, viaticum, and other forms of pastoral care can be offered in a case-by-case basis.

While the Sunday Mass will not be publicly offered during this time, Bishop McClory encourages the faithful to explore other ways to keep the Lord's Day holy. "As is the Catholic tradition, the faithful endeavor to refrain from work, increase our love of the Lord and extend charity to others through prayer and service," the bishop noted. He explained that there are spiritual and devotional practices listed on the diocesan website (www.dcgary.org) and that daily scripture readings can be found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org).

As so many of our routines are disrupted, Bishop McClory suggests that we respond by re-assessing our lives and find new ways to support and love each other. He assures that "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." While we are living in a time where "social distance" is a necessary health precaution, the bishop reminds us to remain "spiritually" close.

The diocese urges everyone to think not only of their own safety, but that of everyone else in the community, by learning more about guidelines for social distancing, vulnerable populations, and cleaning which are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov).

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