



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

Renew Faith • Build Communion • Inspire Hope

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 19, 2020

Solemnity of St. Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Following upon the Letter I wrote to all of you on March 15, 2020, granting a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, if an individual felt the need to do so, I now must write to extend that dispensation to all for the foreseeable future. I must admit that this is the most difficult challenge and heart-wrenching decision I have faced, not only as your Bishop, but in my life as a priest. Never could I imagine that I would be faced with such a need to restrict our people from coming together to celebrate this greatest act of worship that Jesus has given to us in the Eucharistic Celebration of the Holy Mass, especially as our Diocese is observing our “Year of the Eucharist”.

However, in cooperation with the directives of the Center for Disease Control and the Governor of the State of Michigan, and in concert with my brother Bishops throughout the Province and our country, **beginning on Friday, March 20, 2020, all public celebrations of the Holy Mass are suspended until at least April 5, 2020.** We will be monitoring the situation throughout the coming weeks, and will make further decisions as the information is available to us. In addition, all other parish liturgical celebrations and gatherings are suspended for that same period of time. I am also issuing directives to our priests and parish leaders regarding the celebration of the other Sacraments and Rites (Confessions, Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, etc.), as well as expanded, updated guidelines related to the daily life of parish and Diocesan activity. I have also directed that our Diocesan Pastoral Center will close to the public at the end of the day on Thursday, March 19, 2020; however members of the Staff will be available by phone or internet for whatever special needs may arise.

Being unable to come to Mass and receive the Gift of the Eucharist is a huge sacrifice that we must make to protect the health and well-being of all those with whom we come in contact. While this restriction is temporary, and I pray, short-lived, our Faith life continues. We must stay strong in the practice of our Faith through our individual times of prayer, as well as increased family prayer times; our own spiritual reading and reflection on God’s Holy Word; the praying of the Rosary; and other important devotions and spiritual practices. I have asked our priests to keep our churches unlocked and open as much as possible during this time of crisis, and I invite you to come to spend time in prayer and reflection with Jesus Present in the Blessed Sacrament, following all the other proscribed precautions of social distancing. I also want you to know that all our priests will continue celebrating Mass every day privately; I have asked them in particular to offer Masses

regularly for the intentions of the Faithful of their parishes and our Diocese, especially those who are sick, alone, and suffering in other ways during this time of crisis.

Additionally, beginning this Sunday, we will be live-streaming the Celebration of the Mass from our Mother of Mercy Chapel at the Diocesan Pastoral Center. You can find details and instructions on how to watch that live-stream Mass, as well as other opportunities to view and participate in online streamed Masses on our Diocesan website.

While we need to protect ourselves and our families, we also need to extend ourselves to our neighbors and fellow parishioners in works of charitable outreach, ever mindful of the most vulnerable among us, and offering the Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy that are most needed.

As we all know, Lent is a special time to reflect on our relationship with God and one another, and to turn away from sin and turn back to the Lord. This current crisis gives us many opportunities to practice the traditional Lenten penances of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving/works of mercy. The more we can see this time of crisis in this way, the more we will be able to have this very unusual Lent be, for all of us, a time of spiritual growth, strengthening and deepening of our commitment to follow Jesus on the Way of the Cross, and through the Cross, to the Glory of Easter.

May these beautiful words of Pope Francis help us as People of Faith: *“The Holy Spirit’s hope deep in our hearts rekindles the certainty that we are precious because we are loved. It instills the trust that we are not alone. It is a hope that leaves peace and joy within, irrespective of what happens outside. It is a hope that has strong roots that none of life’s storms can uproot.”*

In the turbulence of the current “life storm” we are experiencing, may we all continue to be People of deep Faith, persevering Hope and generous Love as we stay faithful to our relationship with Jesus and His Church. Assuring you of my prayers and blessings for you and your families, and asking that we continue praying for one another, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Paul J. Bradley

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo

