

Latest Coronavirus Measures for the Diocese of Grand Island

To all people of faith and good will in the Diocese of Grand Island,

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus often said to people, “It is your faith that has saved you.” As we struggle with what must be done to limit the spread of the coronavirus in this country, I ask you, above all, to pray for an increase in the supernatural gift of faith. Particularly when our concerns, fears and insecurities disturb our peace. Like St. Joseph, let us renew our faith and trust in God, who sent his only begotten Son, to save us.

Yesterday, the Centers for Disease Control and Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts recommended the cancellation of public assemblies with 10 or more people, including worship services. While this is devastating news, it is vital that we are united in our efforts to contain the spread of this virus. Thus, it is with a heavy heart that I am invoking more stringent measures throughout the Diocese of Grand Island. **Effective immediately, and consistent with the Archdiocese of Omaha and the Diocese of Lincoln, all public Masses and other communal celebrations of the Sacraments or other liturgies are temporarily suspended throughout the Diocese of Grand Island.** In other words, there will be no public funeral services, weddings, Lenten Penance services, Confirmations, retreats, Parish Missions, or the Chrism Mass until further notice.

While funeral services may not take place, the committal of the body or the cremains at the cemetery should be commended to the Lord with only the closest relatives present, as long as the number of those in attendance is in compliance with civil authorities. Then, at a later date, a Memorial Mass or Service for the deceased may be scheduled.

Weddings ceremonies that are limited to the bride and groom, their two witnesses, and their parents may be celebrated, as long as the number of those in attendance is in compliance with civil authorities. Then, at a later time, a full reception may be scheduled to honor the newlyweds and celebrate with them.

These are very difficult measures because of how important our sacramental life is to us. May these limitations on what is most sacred to us, the freedom of worship, renew our longing for the day when we can again assemble to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy and receive our Lord in Holy Communion.

With the suspension of all public Masses, I ask every priest (health permitting) to celebrate Mass in private each day, praying for all those who are afflicted with the Coronavirus, for those in the medical community who are treating patients and for family members who are providing care at home.

While these measures are unprecedented in our times, **there are many ways in which our faith tradition as Catholics can enrich our spiritual lives when we are unable to receive Holy Communion.**

1. While public gatherings for worship are suspended, I ask that our Churches remain open and available daily for private prayer, from sunrise until a reasonable time into the evening. It is my hope that people of faith will come to spend time with our Lord in Eucharistic Adoration, offering him their love and pouring out their heart's deepest desires with great faith in Him.
2. Perhaps you may be able to watch Mass on Television (e.g., on EWTN) or view Sunday Mass livestreamed from somewhere. This is a way of being united, to some degree, with the celebration of the Mass going on throughout the world, and remotely with one another.
3. The practice of making a "Spiritual Communion" is a beautiful way to unite ourselves with the Lord as we express our hunger for Eucharistic communion with him. Making a Spiritual Communion is a beautiful expression of our deep longing to ultimately be united with God for eternity. This can be done at any time, and in any place, including from our own homes.
4. Utilizing the time you would otherwise be at Sunday Mass to read and reflect upon the Sunday Scripture readings, either as a family or individually, can be deepen our sense of being united with our Lord and with one another.
5. Family devotions can also be a way of uniting ourselves within our own homes, to pray the rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Stations of the Cross or other personal devotions.
6. Practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy can be done by making phone calls to those in our parish communities who live alone, encouraging them, praying with them and perhaps offering to bring them groceries or assist them in other ways.

I encourage you to be creative in how you will nourish and deepen your relationship with our Lord in this time before we are able to resume the public celebration of the Sacraments.

Palm Sunday occurs on April 5th this year. As civil authorities continue to assess the situation in our state, I will be providing an update with further direction about the liturgical celebrations for Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Likewise, further details regarding the possibility of livestreaming Masses will be made available as soon as some determination can be made.

Finally, please check regularly the website for the Diocese of Grand Island: www.gidiocese.org for updates and additional information.

Let us invoke the powerful intercession of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church, for his protection upon us all, and his heavenly aid for all who are afflicted with the Coronavirus, and their caregivers.

In Christ, our Hope!

+Joseph G. Hanefeldt
Bishop of Grand Island