



The following directives were communicated to the clergy Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown on March 17, 2020. The directives remain in effect until further notice. If questions arise concerning the impact of these directives, please contact your pastor for further assistance.

BISHOP SUSPENDS THE CELEBRATION OF ALL PUBLIC MASSES

Churches and other public places of worship in the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese are to remain open for private prayer. However, effective immediately, there will be no public liturgies of any sort. That is, there will be no public daily Masses or weekend Masses, no public novenas, communal stations of the cross, ecumenical services, or other public worship until the current COVID-19 crisis has passed. The purpose of this is to retard the spread of the coronavirus. The Bishop will be reviewing the situation daily and will alert priests and deacons immediately when Masses and other public worship can be resumed.

The Bishop authorizes and expects priests to celebrate a private Mass each day during this crisis. All Mass Intentions currently requested / scheduled will be fulfilled. Priests should celebrate a single Mass in place of Saturday evening and Sunday Masses. The Bishop directs that, in light of the unprecedented situation in which we find ourselves, multiple Mass intentions should be coalesced in the one Sunday Mass. The Mass will continue to be broadcast at 11:00 am on Sundays. The Bishop will be the presider at this liturgy and these broadcasts will be available on the Diocesan website and social Media.

Christian Initiation of Adults

Because this crisis is coming at the very time when the Christian Initiation of Adults would reach its apex, the rites regarding the reception of adults into the Church will be suspended until after the crisis has passed. These rites may then be celebrated at parish weekend liturgies once weekend Masses have been restored.

Easter Triduum

Because it seems unlikely that public Masses will be permitted until after Easter, priests should begin making arrangements for the private celebration of the liturgies associated with the Easter Triduum.

Baptisms

Baptisms of children may be held during the restricted period, but they should be limited to members of the immediate family only.

Confirmations

All currently scheduled confirmation Masses have been postponed. The Bishop plans to reschedule confirmations after the crisis has passed.

First Holy Communion

First communion liturgies should be postponed until after the crisis has ended.

The Sacrament of Penance

In terms of the celebration of penance, the Bishop requires that all penance services be canceled until after current restrictions on crowd size have been lifted. The bishop encourages priests to offer specific times when the faithful can come for individual confessions.

Here at St. Benedict Church we will continue to offer individual Confessions on Tuesday at 8:00 am, Thursday at Noon and Saturday at 3:00 pm.

Weddings

Priests will contact couples who are planning weddings in the next several months to determine if these plans have been altered. It is possible, and even likely, that venue changes and cancelations may already have affected couples with scheduled weddings. Because most weddings are not scheduled earlier than mid-April, it should be possible to give more accurate guidance in the next couple of weeks.

Funerals

Funerals may continue to be celebrated but only for immediate family members. The time of the Mass should not be published. It is acceptable for families to have a funeral liturgy outside of Mass celebrated at the funeral home. Vigils should be conducted at the discretion of the families and funeral directors in keeping with the requirements of public safety.

Pastoral Care of the Sick

The Bishop directs that priests and deacons follow these protocols with regard to the visitation and pastoral care of the sick. Those who are hospitalized should continue to receive visitation and sacraments as permitted by hospital policy. Thus priests and deacons who serve as hospital chaplains and in emergent coverage should continue these functions. Priests and deacons should visit parishioners in nursing facilities and rehab units only in danger of death. Similarly, priests and deacons should visit parishioners in their private homes only in danger of death.

Home Communion Visitations are temporarily suspended until this crises has passed.

Pastoral Care in General

Priests and deacons should continue to meet on a one-to-one basis with parishioners for appointments and pastoral counseling. The Diocesan Pastoral Center will be closed for two weeks or until the current situation abates. Email and phone calls will be answered remotely. Similarly, Catholic Charities will be closed but it is possible to leave messages for Catholic Charities staff.

Graduations

Until the Diocesan Education Office receives instruction from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, all graduations are temporarily postponed.

Fundraisers

By direct order of the Bishop, all social gatherings are prohibited until further notice. This includes parish gatherings, meetings of parish groups, fish fries, and other fundraisers. These measures are required in order to avoid person-to-person contact and the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, because it is impossible to observe the necessary sterile procedures and because of the possibility of gatherings of people in excess of what is required for public safety, all take-out meals for fundraising must also be suspended immediately.

