

Bishop Estévez suspends Masses and liturgical events until further notice

March 19, 2020



Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

Effective today, March 19, 2020, all public Masses (weekday or Sunday Masses) have been suspended in parish churches and chapels in the Diocese of St. Augustine until further notice. Priests will continue to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass daily (without participation by the faithful) for the needs of the church and the world, especially as we face the present realities of the pandemic.

“The Catholic Church in the Diocese of St. Augustine must do its part to support medical and governmental efforts to blunt the effects of the COVID-19 virus. The premise underscoring all our actions is to break the chain of physical contact by which this contagion propagates,” said Bishop Felipe Estévez.

“Ideas and actions on limiting numbers of people in groups and ‘social-distancing’ all center on this purpose of minimizing physical contact. The medical fact is that we do not and cannot know with certainty who at any moment might be carrying the virus because COVID-19 manifests itself through many of the same symptoms as other seasonal medical conditions (i.e., flu and allergies). So too, people are contagious for a period of time before displaying these symptoms. And for these reasons, breaking the chain of physical contact is imperative to success.”

Bishop Estévez said, “We must do our part not to promote activities that work against these efforts or attract the faithful to the parish or other group activities. At the same time, this prolonged period that lies ahead of us all has the potential to isolate people and, in so doing, creates loneliness, fear, desperation, and loss of hope. Pope Francis urges its leadership to strike a reasonable balance between medical prudence and pastoral care.”

All clergy have been provided pastoral guidelines and actions by Bishop Estévez that emphasize pastoral discretion and wisdom when making decisions for the parish. This includes directives on funerals, weddings, infant baptisms, and confession. Clergy have also been provided guidelines and protocols to follow when visiting the sick and responding to calls from hospitals and other health care facilities.

Offices and Parish Operations

Many diocesan offices and parishes around the nation are minimizing work in groups and looking for creative ways to keep operations running by limiting the number of office personnel. Parishes have the option of reducing hours of operation and staggering how and when people work to provide appropriate separation to ensure social distancing during church operations. Parish leadership will keep their congregation informed through periodic updates via their website, social media, and other digital forms of communication.

Parishes everywhere have been impacted economically and are struggling. Catholics are asked to continue giving during these difficult times. Several churches have online giving options. Parishioners can also consider mailing their offerings to the parish office.

Catholic Schools and Early Learning Centers

The Department of Catholic Education will continue providing real-time updates at www.dosaeducation.org (<http://www.dosaeducation.org>). All schools in the state will remain closed until April 15. Most of our stand-alone diocesan early learning centers remain open.

Spiritual Communion

In the absence of Mass and the Eucharist, the faithful are encouraged to make a “Spiritual Communion” through the prayer of the Most Holy Redeemer (*Anima Christi*), the prayer of Self-Offering (*Suscipe*), or by praying the prayer below:

*My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there
and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.*

Livestreamed Masses and other Resources

Some of our parishes have live-streaming capabilities to offer the Mass online. Also, Bishop Estévez and several priests of the diocese will provide daily Mass and Sunday Mass from Sacred Heart Chapel at the Catholic Center in Jacksonville via live-streaming on the diocesan Facebook page (www.facebook.com/dosacatholics) (<http://www.facebook.com/dosacatholics>) and YouTube Channel (www.youtube.com/dosacatholics) (<http://www.youtube.com/dosacatholics>).

Bishop Estévez has asked the faithful to continue praying for all those who have been affected by the coronavirus, and in a special way for those who have died due to the pandemic. Please also remember the many first responders and medical personnel who are working tirelessly to serve our community.

For more information and updates from Bishop Estévez, visit www.dosafl.com/coronavirus (<http://www.dosafl.com/coronavirus>).

