



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of Communications

Frequently Asked Questions regarding COVID-19

These questions are answered based on recommendations from local and state officials as of March 23, 2020. Answers are subject to change as new guidelines are issued and we receive more information.

Why have Masses been suspended in the Diocese of Grand Rapids?

We empathize with the sadness that many Catholics are feeling at this time in being unable to partake in the Eucharist at Mass. The decision to cancel Masses has not been made without thoughtful and extensive consultation and consideration. Please know that in issuing the guidelines that we have for parishes and schools, we are relying on guidance and expertise from the Centers for Disease Control along with state and local health care experts who've made clear the need for drastic measures in preventing the spread of COVID-19, especially to our community's most vulnerable members. These actions, while extreme, are temporary, and are being taken in order to cooperate with the best of the scientific community's recommendations, to promote the common good, one of the pillars of Catholic life; and with the express intent of helping mitigate the spread of the coronavirus, prevent a possible overload of our health care system, and ultimately save lives.

With the suspension of public Masses in the diocese, are Catholics dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass?

With this suspension, all Catholics within the territory of the Diocese of Grand Rapids are granted a dispensation from their obligation of attending Sunday Mass through Easter Monday, April 13.

Does the bishop have the authority to suspend Masses and our Mass obligation?

(Arch) Bishops have the authority to authorize or suspend the public offering of Mass within their diocese. The dispensation that is granted by the bishop means you are not committing a mortal sin by missing Mass.

The dispensation however, does not release Catholics from honoring the Lord's Day. Catholics are encouraged to make a spiritual Communion, pray the rosary, or meditate on Sacred Scripture to keep holy the Lord's Day. Additional spiritual resources are available [here](#).

Will I still be able to have a funeral Mass for my loved one?

It is important that we mourn with families. For the time being, all funerals are to be celebrated without Mass and limited to immediate family members only, ensuring that no more than 10 people are present.

Alternately, a committal service at the cemetery may be celebrated outdoors, with appropriate social distancing guidelines in place, with a memorial Mass to be celebrated at a later date. This will allow family and friends to participate in a Eucharist offered for their departed loved ones when the celebration of public Mass resumes.

May I have a funeral luncheon at the parish?

No.

Will I still be able to celebrate my wedding at Church?

Weddings occurring before Tuesday, April 14 are postponed. Weddings after that date will be re-evaluated in light of new information from health officials.

My child is set to receive the sacrament of confirmation this spring. Will that still occur?

Per the updated guidelines issued on March 23, confirmation Masses through Monday, April 13 have been canceled and will be rescheduled. If you have any additional questions, please contact your parish.

Is my parish food pantry open?

Parish food pantries should remain open at this time and follow instructions from local and state health officials.

Are individual confessions still scheduled as normal on March 26th?

Individual confessions will remain available on the evening of Thursday, March 26th from 5-8 p.m. as previously scheduled with due precautions being taken. Confessions should be set up in the main church, not in the confessional, with background music to protect privacy.

Without public Mass on Palm Sunday, will I still be able to receive blessed palms?

Yes. Arrangements for the provisions of palms have not been finalized. The diocesan Office for Worship will work with parishes to find a way to distribute blessed palms in a safe and reasonable manner.

Will we have our usual liturgies for Holy Week and Easter?

Liturgies have been suspended through Easter Monday, April 13. The diocese will be issuing an update for Holy Week and Easter in light of these new directives from state officials.

May Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament take place in churches open for private prayer?

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is a liturgical celebration and is, consequently, suspended together with other public liturgies and devotional services. The faithful are invited to pray to Christ present in the tabernacle.

Will Adoration Chapels remain open?

No, adoration chapels are closed during this time.

May parishes find a way to organize more public Mass times and resume Masses with fewer participants?

No. The temporary cancellation of ALL public Masses in the diocese stands through April 13, 2020 and includes the liturgies of Holy Week. The diocesan directives are meant to eliminate contact between people.

What is meant by: our priests will continue to celebrate Mass each day without a congregation?

Every Mass is, essentially, a communal act of prayer. Not all celebrations of Mass, however, are announced and accessible to the broader public. It is in this sense that our priests will be offering Mass privately over the coming weeks. The Church normally requires that the communal nature of the Mass be expressed through the participation of at least one other person with the priest celebrant. However, current norms in place to protect public health provide just cause for celebrating without the participation of another member of the faithful (can. 906). Therefore, for the

time being, Mass will not be celebrated at the parish's regularly scheduled times and the lay faithful will not be informed of the time of celebration. Again, these restrictions are meant to safeguard public health. Priests may not invite the laity to attend their private Mass.

May the clergy distribute holy Communion outside Mass for the faithful who come to Church to pray?

No

Are the sick who are homebound able to continue to receive holy Communion?

No. Viaticum, however, may be taken to the dying. Our priests will continue to celebrate the sacrament of the anointing of the sick for those who begin to be in danger due to sickness or old age.

Where can I watch Mass now that there are no public, in-person options?

Watch the LIVE broadcast of Sunday Mass each week from the Cathedral of Saint Andrew in Grand Rapids at 10 a.m. ET. Available on the diocesan website, on Facebook or on TV on WXMI Fox 17.

In addition, EWTN offers the live broadcast of Sunday Mass at 8 a.m. and noon, and daily Mass in Spanish: Ver Misa Diaria | Calendario

How should Catholics respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?

At a time like this, we all have questions, many of them beginning with the word "Why?" It's especially important in this time to remember that while God does not remove us from difficulties in our lives, he walks with us and never ceases to care.

During this time, Catholics are asked to follow the guidelines for parishes and schools set out by Bishop Walkowiak to help prevent the spread of the virus. These guidelines are in accordance with directives issued by health experts at the national, state and local levels along with executive orders from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

Catholics are also encouraged to pray. Secondly, we can continue to go outside ourselves to help family members and neighbors to ensure that no one feels abandoned or discouraged or goes without. Social media, text messaging, calling, and other methods of digital communication provide the means to stay connected to others, while practicing social distancing.

What can my family and I do at home together since we're not able to attend Mass?

Catholics are encouraged to make an act of spiritual Communion, a great source of grace; to pray the rosary, or meditate on Sacred Scripture to keep holy the Lord's Day. We can also seek the intercession of our Blessed Mother asking for her help, consolation and for an end to the pandemic. Additional resources may be found here.