

During this difficult time, we ask that our Priests, Deacons and Parish Life Coordinators remain attentive to the needs of the faithful in their communities, especially the needs of shut-ins, the elderly, the sick and the vulnerable. Priests are to remain available for individual confessions and urgent pastoral needs, including the Anointing of the Sick.

As always, the safety of our parishioners and visitors, but also all of our staff, is of utmost priority. While we ask that you maintain normal office hours and be pastorally present during this crisis, you may find it prudent to adapt your normal office procedures in relation to walk-in traffic, primarily encouraging phone calls and emails instead.

We ask that everyone continue with the prevention measures that have been outlined by the Pennsylvania Department of Health in regards to spreading viruses. They include: washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

While profoundly saddened that we are not able to celebrate the Eucharist as community, we are reminded that Christ always remains with us, especially in times of uncertainty such as these.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Should priests still say a non-public Mass every day?

Yes. Priests are directed to celebrate Masses non-publicly on a daily basis for the good of the People of God, the Church and the intentions of the day.

2. Can those non-public masses be videotaped or live streamed to a parish website or social media platforms?

Over the last weekend, several parishes live-streamed one or more of their weekend services on social media. Offering online Masses (whether through your parish website or social media channels) provide opportunities for the faithful to remain connected in some way to the Sacrifice of the Mass during this difficult time. Parishes with the potential to broadcast their own Masses in this way should do so. The schedule of those live-stream or recorded Masses should be announced through email, parish websites, social media and bulletins. If parishes are unfamiliar with ways to broadcast their Masses – please contact the Diocesan Office of Communications at (570) 207-2229 for further assistance.

3. Can parishioners join the “non-public” Masses held by an individual priest if they reach out and request to join?

No. In an effort to protect the health and welfare of the public, in addition to the health and welfare of our parish priests, we request that pastors celebrate these Masses privately.

4. What are the guidelines for the Sacrament of Confession?

At this time, when an individual approaches a priest to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an appropriate distance (at least six feet) should be maintained between the penitent and confessor. An appropriate location in the Church or sacristy should be chosen (not a rectory or parish office). Care should be taken to disinfect the space following each confession.

5. Will the “Light Is On For You” Monday Confessions continue during Lent?

No. The “Light is On For You” that is currently scheduled to be held on Monday, March 16, 2020 can proceed as normal. Starting on March 17, 2020, this program will be temporarily suspended.

6. Should larger events like Stations of the Cross, Road to Resurrection, or Penance Services be cancelled?

Yes. These gatherings must be cancelled in light of the most recent guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

7. Should parish events or fundraisers continue at this time?

All parish events, including fundraisers, dinners, etc. should be cancelled.

8. What are the guidelines for the Pastoral Care of the Sick at this time?

Prompted by many hospitals that have directed the suspension of individuals visiting patients, all Extraordinary Ministers of Communion must refrain from visiting hospitals and nursing homes until further notice. Communal celebrations of the Anointing of Sick are to be suspended. The sacrament should be offered on an individual basis. With any pastoral visits to the homebound, ministers of Communion, both ordinary and extraordinary, should practice meticulous handwashing. If the person being visited is ill with an infectious disease, he or she should be offered a mask. The minister may also wear a mask and if necessary, gloves.

9. Have any decisions been made about the liturgies of Holy Week and/or Easter?

Directives for celebration of the liturgies of Holy Week will be forthcoming.

10. How will the suspension of Masses impact First Holy Communion and Confirmation in my parish?

It is highly likely that these celebrations will need to be postponed due to the cancellation of public Masses and Religious Education programs to a later date once the current health crisis has subsided.

11. Sacramental celebrations including weddings, baptisms and funerals will continue – with attendance limited to immediate family members – how many people is too many?

Starting immediately, the Centers for Disease Control has recommended that public events have no more than 50 people. Due to the rapidly changing nature of this situation, that number could certainly change. We encourage all pastors to make smart and prudent decisions in each individual circumstance and to use common sense and rely on the current guidance of national, state and local leaders. Social distancing and alternative row seating in pews is to be strongly advised.

In celebrating wedding and funeral Masses, all of the directives previously issued for the Celebration of Mass (eliminating the Sign of Peace, no offering the Precious Blood, etc) must be applied.

Communal baptisms are discouraged. Fresh water should be used for each baptism and then discarded. If more than one person is to be baptized, water should be blessed in individual vessels and then poured over the head.

The use of cemetery chapels for final committal services is temporarily discontinued. Committal services should be grave-side only, weather permitting.

12. What resources are the Diocese of Scranton providing to help the faithful join in the Communal Celebration of Mass?

Despite the suspension of public Masses, a private Mass will be celebrated daily in the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton, and made available on CTV: Catholic Television of the Diocese of Scranton. On weekdays, the Mass will be broadcast at 12:10 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. On weekends, the Saturday Vigil Mass will be broadcast at 4:00 p.m. and rebroadcast on Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m. The Masses will also be streamed on the Diocese of Scranton's website (www.dioceseofscranton.org), made available on the Diocese of Scranton's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and will be accessible on the Diocese of Scranton's YouTube channel.

Additional resources for individual parishioners to deepen their faith during Lent are also available on the Diocese of Scranton's website.

13. Are churches to remain open daily?

At this time, we encourage pastors or parish life coordinators to choose a time that works best in your parish that encourages individual prayer. This needs to be monitored closely to make sure each parish is following the current directives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If large numbers of parishioners decide to congregate at any one time, please re-evaluate the prudence of continuing this practice. Each parish should make sure to secure their facilities as appropriate.

14. Should parish bulletins still be printed?

Yes, if that is possible for your parish. Bulletins should still be produced and left in the normal places in churches where people can find them and be updated on what is occurring in the parish. Bulletins should also be shared as widely as possible, including on websites and social media, to keep parishioners connected