



JOSEPH EDWARD STRICKLAND
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE APOSTOLIC SEE
BISHOP OF TYLER

D E C R E E

Suspending the Public Celebration of Mass and Enacting Other Measures

Considering that it is my responsibility to show concern and act with humanity and the charity of Christ toward all those entrusted to my care as Bishop of Tyler (c. 383, §§1, 3), and recognizing my duty to direct, promote, and guard the liturgical life of the diocese (c. 835, §1); and

Having consulted medical experts and heeding the guidance of the civil authorities and public health professionals regarding the critical need to limit gatherings to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus disease, including the guidelines issued by the President of the United States in this time of national emergency;

Therefore, in virtue of my ordinary, proper, and immediate authority as diocesan bishop, I hereby decree as follows:

1. The **suspension of all public Masses** in the Diocese of Tyler. Accordingly, this includes a dispensation for all the faithful in the diocese from the obligation to participate at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation (cc. 87, §1; 1247).
2. The celebration of **Holy Mass by the priest privately (without the people) should continue** and include, if possible, the assistance of only one other adult minister who is asymptomatic (cc. 904; 906). Previously scheduled intentions, including the weekly Mass for the people, may be fulfilled in this manner.
3. The faithful are encouraged to keep the Lord's day holy and celebrate Sunday as a domestic church by taking time to pray together as a household (c. 1248, §2). Diocesan media will have resources for daily Mass readings, spiritual communion, and other devotions.
4. **Baptisms** may still be celebrated, but with the requirement to keep attendance to asymptomatic immediate family and godparents.
5. The **sacrament of penance** should still be offered, but penance services are to be canceled. When celebrated individually, proper social distancing should be observed as much as possible. Consideration should be given to moving the penitent approximately six feet from the confessor, even if this would necessitate using a different room than is normally used for confession or celebrating the sacrament in a more open location.

6. Visits to the sick may still take place and **anointing of the sick** should still be celebrated by priests for those who are seriously ill or in danger of death, but always following the recommended protocols for handwashing and use of masks by those infected and those who are ministering. Priests are reminded that they may use an instrument (e.g. a cotton swab) to anoint if there is a grave reason (c. 1000, §2).
7. Public **weddings** should be rescheduled, particularly those in April. Simple weddings may be celebrated, but only with the minister, official witnesses, and asymptomatic immediate family members.
8. **Funerals** may be celebrated, but only with the minister and immediate family members. Pastors may use discretion on requests from families to include others.
9. **Public celebrations** of the Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, and other devotional gatherings are suspended until the public celebration of Mass resumes. Churches may remain open for private prayer, provided due regard is given to the proper sanitization and hygiene procedures.

I order that this decree be made known to all concerned and communicated to the faithful by the pastors of the diocese.

These measures take effect March 18, 2020 and will remain in force until further notice, with an update to be provided on April 1. Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Tyler, at the Diocesan Curia, on March 17, 2020, the Memorial of St. Patrick.



✠ Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler



Peyton Low
Chancellor

