



Diocese of Rockford

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Office of the Bishop

March 17, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The outbreak of the coronavirus has become an event unique in our lifetime. While diseases and epidemics have always been a part of human history, in recent decades medical advances have largely protected us from such outbreaks, at least in our part of the world.

As we have seen in recent days, the growth in understanding of the danger of this virus along with the corresponding expansion of guidance from health professionals has impacted our lives as believers and as citizens.

First and foremost, we are people of faith. Our lives of prayer, the sacraments and the practice of our faith come together as our witness to the gift of faith. In that context, the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” (Lumen Gentium 11).

At the same time, as citizens we are participants in our society and so we bear our responsibility to contribute to the common good.

In light of these considerations, and with deep regret, I am announcing today the suspension of public Masses, both weekday and Sunday Masses, in the Diocese of Rockford effective tomorrow, March 18, 2020. That suspension reflects the most recent guidance from the Federal Government and from the State of Illinois for the limitation of public gatherings to reduce the opportunity for contracting and spreading the coronavirus. All Catholics within the Diocese are dispensed from the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation (per canons 85 and 87 in the code of canon law of 1983).

During this time all priests are to continue to offer the Mass privately each day. Pastors are obliged to celebrate a “*Pro Popolo*” Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation in fulfillment of Can. 534. Emergency requests for urgent pastoral needs including the Last Sacrament and the Eucharist should of course be covered. Churches should as much as possible remain open for private prayer and for confessions.

At this time, even if we cannot physically attend Mass, each of us needs to continue to pray daily. During this Lenten Season, consider praying over the readings for the Mass of the day which are available on line (<http://www.usccb.org/bible/>) or in prepared Missals. Guidance for prayer and making a spiritual communion is posted at www.rockforddiocese.org. Please keep in your prayers all those who are afflicted by the virus, their family members, doctors and nurses treating the sick, those who have lost employment and all whose lives have been upended in this moment.

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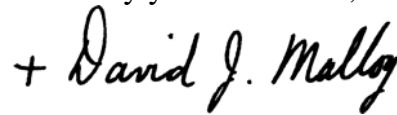
As indicated in previous guidance from the Diocese of Rockford, weddings and funerals and baptisms should still be offered under conditions of limited numbers of attendees in order to minimize the opportunity for transmission of the virus. I am also announcing the temporary closure of the Diocese Administration Center, beginning tomorrow and continuing through March 31, 2020. Whether this date must be extended will be evaluated as March 31 approaches. Diocesan Administrative staff will attempt to monitor email communications during this urgent situation. Likewise, given the guidance of the health authorities, all parish center and school offices should be closed. Coverage should be from the parish priests and if necessary one staff member on a very minimal schedule for essential business only.

St. Elizabeth Catholic Community Center and Catholic Charities offices will function with modified and restricted hours related to food distribution for the poor and urgent services only.

Of course we need to ask how long such restrictions will be needed. Much of the current guidance is directed at reducing personal contact for the next two weeks. **For that reason, the suspension of the public offering of Mass will last until at least Saturday April 4.** Given the constantly updated guidance being given by health authorities, that date appears to be only advisory at this time. The Diocese of Rockford will continue to monitor developments and further directives will be issued closer to that date, especially with regard to the celebration of Holy Week.

I ask for your prayers, your patience and your understanding in these difficult days. Jesus told His followers, "I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt. 28:20). We trust in His guidance now as we respond to the threats from the coronavirus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ David J. Malloy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford