



Very Reverend Michel J. Mulloy
Diocesan Administrator
Diocese of Rapid City



Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls

JOINT STATEMENT: THE SPIRITUAL LEADERS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESES OF SIOUX FALLS AND RAPID CITY

*Dispensation from the Obligation to attend Sunday Masses
due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus until further notice*

March 13, 2020

Earlier this week and in our respective capacities as spiritual leaders of the two dioceses in South Dakota, we announced measures for limiting the spread of illness during Masses. These statements were circulated within parishes and can be accessed on the two diocesan websites¹.

With public health officials providing additional guidance this week that has led to the cancellation of sporting and cultural events, we write to offer further clarification and guidance. While the Church has not been asked by government officials at this time to suspend the celebration of Masses, these additional measures honor the spirit of what those competent in public health are advocating in light of the facts that have come forward in this current COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic.

All Catholics have an obligation to God to participate in Sunday Mass in ordinary circumstances. This obligation can be suspended for just causes. We also bear a duty to protect those who are most vulnerable among us.

Due to the arrival of the COVID-19/Coronavirus to South Dakota, we have determined it prudent and a just cause to dispense all Catholics within the state's borders from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. If Catholics feel that congregating for Sunday Mass would bring an undue risk to themselves or others, they have the freedom to not attend Mass. Masses will still be celebrated in our parishes to provide for those who are healthy. However, if pastors feel, because of particular circumstances in the parish or because of their own vulnerability, that the celebration of Holy Mass in a public setting brings an undue risk, they have the freedom to suspend the celebration of Sunday Masses in their parishes. Anyone feeling ill is asked to not come to Mass so as not to expose others to illness.

Since the Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith and our spiritual nourishment in our journey of faith this decision to dispense the Sunday obligation is not taken lightly. It has been made with the awareness that the COVID-19/Coronavirus can be life threatening and has placed strain on healthcare systems across the world. We feel it prudent to allow Catholics to be dispensed from Mass should they choose this option.

It is important we all remember that honoring the Sabbath is God's command, not His Church's. Therefore, Catholics who are unable to attend Sunday Mass or who chose not to in light of this dispensation are urged to make "spiritual Communion" while joining in radio, television, or

online broadcasts of the Sunday Mass. More information about these opportunities can be found on the diocesan websites¹. The Rosary and other devotions are also ways that Catholics can honor the Lord's Day and offer proper reverence to him while also receiving the spiritual help God desires to give us.

We urge all Catholics to offer additional prayer during this health crisis. In particular, we would ask all Catholics to pray for the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church and St. Joseph, Protector of the Church. Let us continue to pray for the sick and dying, for those caring for them and for those working to minimize the impact of COVID-19. Let us pray for our own protection and care, for those who fear death without knowing the Lord's loving care, and for strengthening our hope of eternal life.

Since God has promised to be with us at all times, let us turn to him in prayer, remain calm and tend to our brothers and sisters in need: those in our families, neighborhoods, and around the world.

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References

www.sfcatholic.org

www.rapidcitydiocese.org