

Suspension of Public Celebration of Mass; Temporary Closure of Archdiocesan Schools, Pastoral Center, Related Agencies

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ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



This message is for all clergy and staff in the archdiocese.

Based on current guidelines from local public health departments, which recommend the cancellation of public gatherings involving 250 or more people, Cardinal Cupich mandated the suspension until further notice of all liturgical services effective Saturday evening with the regularly scheduled weekend services. In addition, he has mandated the closing of schools operated by the archdiocese, and to close the Pastoral Center and related agency offices until further notice.

“This was not a decision I made lightly,” said Cardinal Cupich. “The Eucharist is the source and summit of our life as Catholics. And our schools and agencies provide essential services to many thousands across Cook and Lake Counties. But, in consultation with leaders from across the archdiocese, for the sake of the safety of our students, parishioners, and all the women and men who serve the people of the archdiocese, it is clear that we must take the better part of caution in order to slow the spread of this pandemic.”

Parish and Sacramental Practice

By exception, weddings and funerals scheduled for Saturday, March 14 may proceed observing the guidelines issued by the Governor of Illinois, limiting participation to no more than 250.

While public Mass will be suspended **beginning Saturday evening, March 14**, archdiocesan churches should remain open for private prayer during a timeframe best determined by each pastor. To achieve this, the archdiocese has asked pastors to coordinate limited staff presence in parishes to answer calls and perform routine maintenance with a heightened focus on disinfecting all areas of common use.

We encourage priests to celebrate Mass privately for the good of the People of God, the church and the intentions of the day.

Televised and online Masses 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 should do so.

Additional guidance will be forthcoming from the Office of the Vicar General on the administration and celebration of other sacraments.

Schools

The decision to temporarily close our schools, **beginning Monday, March 16**, applies to all Catholic schools that are operated by the Archdiocese of Chicago. Catholic schools not operated by the archdiocese, such as those sponsored by religious orders, will make decisions individually.

During this closure period, Catholic school students will be asked to complete academic work through electronic learning (“e-learning”) or alternative learning.

Knowing that many families and students of our Catholic schools depend on the daily services we provide, the Office of Catholic Schools and archdiocesan leadership are working to coordinate extended support to those families and students most in need during this time. More information will be shared in the coming days.

Pastoral Center and Agencies

Pastoral Center and school staff are expected to work from home, **beginning Monday, March 16**. With guidance that will be forthcoming, staffing at parishes will be determined at the discretion of the pastor. All employees will continue to be paid during this period. Effective immediately and until further notice, all work-related travel is prohibited.

Our agencies that serve the poor and vulnerable will be making separate announcements about their continuing operation.

“In this time of legitimate concern for the safety of ourselves, our loved ones and those at the margins of society, we must hold fast to the knowledge that the impulses that come from God bring courage, consolation, generosity and solidarity,” said Cardinal Cupich. “Instead of allowing this moment to trap us in fear, we must find unity in advancing all that is good in our common humanity. This means staying spiritually and emotionally close to one another, in our families, our friendships and our communities. It means helping where possible and safe. It means checking on the vulnerable. It means being responsible about hygiene. This is a time to be gentle with one another. For Christians, it is a time to reflect on how Jesus made those struggling with illness a priority. It is also a time to be surprised by the blessings that come from being part of the same family —the human family.”

The archdiocese will provide detailed instructions to its pastors and school leaders and will share updates on an ongoing basis.

Peace,
Bishop Ron Hicks
Vicar General