



27 March 2020

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM BISHOP FABBRO

The Episcopal Council met by telephone on Wednesday, 25 March, and discussed many issues that have been raised by pastoral teams and parishioners alike. Father Michael Bechard, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese, participated in the meeting. The following represents a consensus of the Council, and it is my intention that these new directives become effective immediately:

1. Recordings of Masses (livestreaming or uploaded)

The restriction on livestreaming or otherwise broadcasting Masses from churches is now rescinded with qualifications (20 March, #2). Many priests wrote or called to tell us how important it was for them to be able to provide this service for their parishioners; many parishioners expressed a desire to see and hear their own priests. Parish teams choosing to offer such Masses must be mindful of the following:

- a) To avoid any sense of clericalism, private Masses may include a member of the pastoral team or staff to act as lector or server, but should not include any others from the parish. This is a better choice, even if there is a second resident priest or visitor concelebrating the Mass. These private Masses are strictly limited to one lay person, as we must be mindful of avoiding crowds and contact, and “planking the curve”. Priests in the same Family of Parishes or other neighbouring priests who do not have the capability of streaming or recording Masses may be invited to concelebrate, even to take a turn as presider at another parish. Physical distancing is to be maintained and modeled.
- b) No parish should feel bound to provide this service where they are unable or unprepared to do so.
- c) Care should be taken to make the celebration not only liturgically correct, but also dignified and prayerful. The presider should be familiar with the technical aspects of the recording so that the act of recording does not detract from the celebration. A visiting presider or concelebrant should be guided through the process by an experienced presider before such recordings are begun. Facebook Live and YouTube are the preferred platforms for use. No one should use his or her personal social media accounts to broadcast Masses or other things on behalf of the parish; only parish accounts may be used.
- d) The faithful should be instructed in such a way as to realize that, by watching Mass *via* the internet or on television, they are not celebrating Mass with the priest and others present. They are watching and participating spiritually, while only those who are present in person celebrate the Mass with the presider.
- e) The directive of 20 March applied only to recording Masses. It did not limit a parish team from providing other opportunities for parishioners *via* the internet, such as devotions, messages of concern or support, catechesis, and reflections. Parish teams are encouraged to find ways to reach out to parishioners who have internet services, while remembering that many may not have such access, and would benefit from other forms of contact such as a telephone call.

2. Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

In light of the Ontario government’s directions to stay home, and to close all but essential stores and offices, the recommendation to bless palm branches and make them available outside of churches for parishioners to pick up is withdrawn (20 March, #6). To minimize the possibility of contagion and to prevent people from gathering, palms are not to be blessed or distributed for the year 2020. Any palms that have been received are to be discarded or composted.

3. The Sacred Triduum

After receiving clarifications regarding the decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (19 March 2020), and hearing the great desire of many priests to celebrate the Triduum in its entirety, the directives in the last update for the Triduum (20 March, #6) are rescinded, with the exceptions as noted below. I am celebrating the Triduum at the Cathedral with Bishop Dabrowski. These celebrations will be recorded and uploaded on the website for any to watch. The recording of these celebrations does not preclude parishes from broadcasting their services.

In addition, we ask our French and National parishes which are broadcasting the Masses and services to provide their link to Matthew Clarke <mclarke@dol.ca> so we can make them available to the people of the Diocese.

The following directives will now guide the celebrations in the Diocese:

a) The Mass of the Lord's Supper – Thursday, 9 April

The Mass of the Lord's Supper will be celebrated at the Cathedral by Bishop Fabbro, and will be posted on social media at 7:00 p.m.

The Holy See has provided permission for individual priests to celebrate The Mass of the Lord's Supper. The Washing of the Feet and the procession of the Blessed Sacrament are suspended. The Blessed Sacrament will be reposed in the tabernacle.

Priests who will be unable to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper are to pray the Vespers (Evening Prayer) of the Day.

b) Good Friday – Friday, 10 April

The Service of Good Friday will be celebrated at the Cathedral, and will be posted on social media at 3:00 p.m.

Following the special decree from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, special prayers will be said "for the sick, the dead, for those who feel lost or dismayed" (cf. *The Roman Missal*, p. 296ff). The following prayer is to be added as the eleventh Solemn Intercession:

Let us pray, dearly beloved,
to God the Father almighty,
that he many extend his hand in mercy
to all those affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Prayer in silence. Then the Priest says:

Almighty and ever-living God,
heal those who are ill,
comfort those who mourn,
give solace to all who are afraid and alone,
and protect those who are providing medical care.
Make us instruments of your peace
among our brothers and sisters.
In your mercy, alleviate our fears
and eliminate this scourge,
so that we may come together again
to give you praise and build your Kingdom.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

c) The Easter Vigil – Saturday, 11 April

The Easter Vigil will be celebrated at the Cathedral, and will be posted on social media at 9:00 p.m.

The Blessing of the Paschal Fire is to be eliminated.

After the Paschal Candle is lit, the Easter Proclamation (Exultet) is to be sung or spoken.

The Liturgy of the Word is maintained.

Baptismal promises are to be renewed.

The Eucharist continues as normal.

The initiation of the Elect and those seeking full communion will be deferred to a later time, to be determined. This directive includes the celebrations of the Scrutinies.

d) Easter Sunday – Sunday, 12 April

The Mass of Easter Sunday will be celebrated at the Cathedral, and will be posted on social media at 11:00 a.m.

Priests will follow the norms for Masses in private, as previously laid out.

Many priests have expressed an ardent desire to make the sacrament of Penance available to their people. The Episcopal Council was firm that we must not change the direction as given on 17 March, "All Confessions are cancelled, except in the case of danger of death" (#2a).

A priest hearing confessions in any reasonable proximity to penitents, so that they can be heard, sets up a situation whereby the priest himself may unwittingly become a conduit for spreading the virus. We cannot take that chance and risk further spread. Rather, people need to hear the words of assurance of God's forgiveness, when one is truly repentant and expresses it to God. Pope Francis said this so beautifully on 20 March, and his words are captured in the update distributed that day (#7). This is the message that people need to hear, through e-mail or recorded reflections offered by their pastoral team members.

The Episcopal Council was unable to address all the questions given to the Vicars during this session. We will meet early next week to continue to respond to questions recently received. I thank you for your prayers for our work, and assure you of Bishop Joseph's and mine.



Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London