



Catholic Diocese of Evansville

Office of the Bishop

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March 17, 2020
Memorial of St. Patrick

Dear Fathers,

In light of new information and recommendations from health officials concerning the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency to stem the spread of the virus, and after consultation with the College of Consultors, Deans and Diocesan staff, **I have joined the other four bishops of Indiana in suspending – effective March 18 and until further notice – all public Sunday and weekday Masses throughout our dioceses.** A public announcement will be made today at 9:00am.

In addition, the following will be implemented in the Diocese of Evansville also effective tomorrow, March 18, 2020:

- All funeral liturgies will be celebrated using the Liturgy outside of Mass. Funeral liturgies can be held in churches or funeral homes. There is also the option of simply celebrating the Rite of Committal with Final Commendation at the cemetery. With any of these choices, participation/attendance will be limited to the presider and the immediate family of the deceased. Memorial Masses can be offered at a later date once the health crisis has passed.
- All weddings will be celebrated utilizing the Order without Mass. Participation/attendance will be limited to the presider, the engaged couple, the wedding party and the immediate family of the engaged couple.
- All baptisms of children will be celebrated one child at a time, outside of Mass. Participation/attendance will be limited to the presider and the immediate family of the child being baptized.
- Confirmations are suspended.
- Churches will remain open for prayer, but the faithful are urged to practice social-distancing efforts to minimize their own and others' potential exposure.

Matt Miller will be sending more specific guidelines, recommendations and best practices regarding liturgical issues.

Needless to say, these decisions, especially the suspension of Mass, were extremely difficult to make. I fully realize the impact the absence of Mass will have on the spiritual lives of our people, centered as they are on the Eucharist. It was a matter of balancing these spiritual needs with the profound health risks that threaten our communities, especially our seniors and those with physical vulnerabilities. I firmly believe that this action does not imply a lack of faith in God's providence, but rather a trust in the gifts of wisdom and prudence He provides all of us, as well as the knowledge and expertise He has bestowed on doctors, researchers and public health officials who are advising us in these matters.

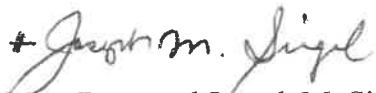
I hope that you will continue to celebrate Mass each day, even without a congregation. Now, more than ever, we need to lift up in the Eucharist the needs of our people, our nation and our world. Parishioners need to know that the Mass is still being offered daily for them and their intentions, even if they cannot attend.

I know you will make every effort to remain spiritually and pastorally close to your people, even as you are not able to minister to them in the ways in which they and you are accustomed. I trust that you will find creative and effective ways to shepherd your parishioners during this time when there is so much fear and confusion. Also, please be sure to take every precaution to care for your health and wellbeing. You and your ministry are precious gifts that are greatly needed and valued by me and the faithful of this diocese.

Tim McGuire will be sending guidelines and suggestions from Diocesan Directors on various pertinent issues for parishes. We will try to keep you informed on as timely a basis as possible as this health crisis continues to evolve.

We entrust our local Church to the loving protection and intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and Health of the Sick. Let us continue to pray for the sick and their families, healthcare providers, public health officials and all civic leaders during the weeks to come. Know that you will be in my prayers, especially at Mass, and I ask for remembrance in yours.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Joseph M. Siegel". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Most Reverend Joseph M. Siegel, DD, STL
Bishop of Evansville