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March 13, 2020

RE: COVID-19/Coronavirus and the  
Restriction of Public Mass until Friday, March 27, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19/Coronavirus as a global pandemic. Governor Dunleavy also announced an emergency declaration amid the COVID-19/Coronavirus concerns for Alaska. Based on these actions, and the fact that local health officials predict significant spreading if we do not attempt to slow it down, I want us to do our part to help prevent the spread of this virus.

This is a very serious situation. It is with this in mind that I now announce there will be no public celebration of Mass across the Archdiocese of Anchorage or other large gatherings – effective Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> through Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>. This includes all public Liturgies, Masses, Benedictions, Stations of the Cross, faith formation classes, and other types of church activities. Today's directive was made for the common good and for the people of God entrusted in our care — many of whom are considered high risk and vulnerable. We must do our part to slow down this epidemic.

It is through this framework that pastors will approach decision-making about parish life. We do not want parish life to come to a screeching halt; however, it would be irresponsible of us to gather large groups of people. Instead, we encourage pastors to think about necessary activities and postpone group gatherings — keeping in mind the common good.

In light of my directive, I want to let you know that you are temporarily dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until the COVID-19/Coronavirus danger lessens, and Masses are reinstated. This directive, however, does not close the church. Pastors may still:

- Set specific hours for the church to be open for private prayer.
- Reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the church for private prayer.
- Schedule appointments for Confession.
- Pray the Rosary in small groups, with people at least 6 feet apart from each other.

During this time, pastors will also be available for weddings and funerals (with limited people), pastoral emergencies, private meetings, anointing of sick, and so on. At the end of the day, we want to ensure we are slowing the spread of the COVID-19/Coronavirus and protecting the vulnerable in our community, while also serving your needs as parishioners.

In addition, on my instructions, the Director of Catholic Schools announced that Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Anchorage will follow the school closure guidance from the local public school districts.


These two directives significantly impact the lives of those who reside in the Archdiocese of Anchorage. People will spend more time at home now. But as Catholics we still have the opportunity to manifest Christ's love and mercy more than ever during these challenging times. Here are some ideas to show His love and mercy:

- Expand outreach by making phone calls to homebound neighbors, relatives and local nursing home residents to accompany them in spirit.
- Offer to pray over the phone.
- Offer to go grocery shopping for others who need to stay at home.
- Our homeless neighbors will be encountering more hunger as local restaurants and catering companies begin to reduce the preparation of meals. Increase giving to local foodbanks, Catholic Social Services, and St. Vincent de Paul Society.
- Consider donating blood or plasma.
- Purchase gas cards for your local nursing home or hospital health care providers and drop them off at the front desk as a thank you gift from the local Catholic church.

Let's continue to pray for each other — especially as we continue our Lenten journey. This is a difficult time, but we must trust in the Lord.

Thank you for your understanding regarding these actions, and for your continued prayers to all of those who will be impacted by this virus.

Many blessings and peace,



Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M. *Am*