

March 12, 2020

The celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. It is in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that we encounter the mystery of our redemption, are nourished by God's Word, and receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

For these reasons, the Church places a grave obligation for the faithful to participate at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. This fulfills the Lord's command to "keep holy the Sabbath."

Nevertheless, for a just cause the Church's pastors may dispense the faithful from this grave obligation. Given the declared pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, Archbishop Alexander K. Sample therefore issues the following directives. He does so out of an abundance of concern for the health and wellbeing of the people of God entrusted to his pastoral care.

The governor of the state of Oregon, Kate Brown, has cancelled all public gatherings of more than 250 people. The fact is that most of the Masses celebrated on the weekends in the Archdiocese of Portland are far below that number. Therefore:

1. Anyone 60 years or older is encouraged to consider not attending Mass, since they are the most vulnerable to this virus. They would therefore be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass.
2. Persons who have underlying medical issues that put them at risk, or persons with compromised immune systems, are asked not to attend Mass. They, likewise, would be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass.
3. Persons who are not feeling well, no matter how mild the symptoms, are urged not to attend Mass. They also would be dispensed from the obligation.
4. A general dispensation is offered to anyone else in the Archdiocese of Portland who sincerely and seriously think they might be at risk. This dispensation maybe used by anyone of any age.
5. The faithful who *are* in attendance at Mass are reminded to avoid all physical contact with others and should attempt to keep a safe distance from each other.

These directives and dispensations will remain in effect until April 8, 2020, in keeping with Gov. Brown's directive. The archdiocese will continue to monitor and evaluate the situation, and offer further direction as circumstances change or as further direction is given by public officials.

Some further things to consider:

1. Any parish gatherings other than Mass that would exceed 250 people should be canceled. Please note that the Department of Catholic Schools has issued its own guidelines regarding school gatherings. Please follow their directions.
2. Parishes should break down school Masses so as to keep the numbers below 250.
3. Even with the above directives in place, some parishes may still have difficulty keeping Mass attendance below 250. Pastors are encouraged to be creative in managing this situation. Some possibilities would be to encourage the faithful to attend Masses in the parish that are known to be less attended. Another possibility would be to add Masses to help spread out the numbers at each Mass.
4. Those who would make use of the dispensations mentioned above may want to consider attending a daily Mass in the parish.
5. Those who would make use of the dispensations mentioned above and not participate in Mass on the weekend may want to consider watching Mass via television or livestreamed on the internet. Some parishes may wish to livestream their own parish Mass and make it available online.
6. Those who make use of the dispensations mentioned above and would not be present at Mass on the weekend are encouraged to make an act of Spiritual Communion. This is a beautiful devotional practice in the Church and is a real source of grace in communion with our Lord. Some people who are in attendance at Mass may for their own reasons feel uncomfortable at this time receiving Holy Communion at Mass due to a fear of contamination. These are also encouraged to make an act of Spiritual Communion. Below is an example of a prayer for spiritual communion.

My Jesus,

I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

During these difficult and trying times, let us keep one another in prayer and pray especially for those who are most vulnerable to this virus. Let us also remember those who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and their grieving families. Placing our trust in Jesus, we will together make it through this time.

MOST REVEREND
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DISPENSATION FROM THE OBLIGATION OF ATTENDING MASS

Considering the recent decision of the Honorable Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon, to implement various measures aiming to slow the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on the 11th of March 2020, including a prohibition on gatherings exceeding 250 persons;

Whereas the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has proposed various mitigation strategies for faith-based communities to protect at-risk individuals and communities;

Whereas it is the duty of the diocesan bishop as pastor to be concerned for all of the faithful entrusted to his care (c. 383 §1), to act with charity toward all (c. 383 §3-4), and to direct, promote, and guard the liturgical life including the celebration of the sacraments (c. 835 §1);

In view of the spiritual needs of the faithful during this season of Lent, motivated by great care and concern for the wellbeing of all those present in our state, and always ready to take steps to preserve human life, I hereby dispense, in virtue of canon 87 §1, the following members of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon and those actually present in the Archdiocese from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation (c. 1247):

1. All persons 60 years and older
2. Persons who have underlying medical issues that put them at risk, or persons with compromised immune systems
3. Persons who are not feeling well even with mild symptoms
4. Others of any age who sincerely and seriously think they might be at risk

Those dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass, nonetheless, are bound to keep holy the Sabbath by abstaining “from those works and affairs which hinder the worship to be rendered to God, the joy proper to the Lord’s day, or the suitable relaxation of mind and body” (c. 1247) and by “devoting themselves to prayer for a suitable time” (c. 1248 §2).

This dispensation shall be communicated to all concerned with immediate effect in accord with canon 62, and it shall remain in force until the 8th of April 2020.

Given at the Pastoral Center of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon on this 12th day of March 2020, everything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample, J.C.L.
Archbishop of Portland in Oregon

Sr. Veronica Schueler, F.S.E.
Chancellor

