

Bishop suspends Masses after March 21

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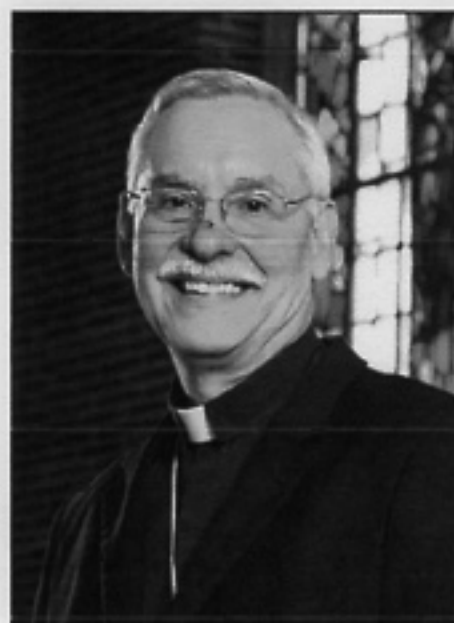
En Español

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor issued the following letter, March 12, 2020, to the people of the Diocese of Little Rock about "required changes in response to COVID-19."

"As your bishop, I have an obligation to do what we can to minimize the spread of COVID-19, especially to the most vulnerable among us. In response to COVID-19, the Diocese of Little Rock is trying to be pro-active rather than reactive. Accordingly, certain measures must be put in place in an effort to "flatten the curve" such that the spike in COVID-19 cases is not too high, too fast, such that our healthcare providers are overwhelmed.

"While COVID-19 is unlikely to be serious for most people, we have an obligation to care for the very young, the aged, and those with compromised immune systems. And the best way we can care for them is minimizing large group gatherings for the time being. Taking into account that large gatherings are a factor in the spread of the disease; that there is a long lead time before symptoms present themselves and infection is known; that (God forbid) priests, deacons, and lay ministers could unknowingly transmit the disease to others, or congregants to one another; and that we have to draw on our faith and spiritual resources to face this threat; I hereby promulgate the following:

- 1.) The Sunday Mass obligation is dispensed for all Catholics effective immediately. Public Masses shall be suspended starting the weekend of March 21-22, except for small groups at the discretion of the priest. Whenever possible churches will be kept open during daylight hours for private prayer and Eucharistic Adoration as an alternative to Sunday Mass.
- 2.) All non-essential gatherings at parishes for the rest of March and April are cancelled or postponed, pending further notice. This includes but is not limited to previously-scheduled



confirmation ceremonies.

- 3.) All communal penance services are cancelled. Face-to-face confessions are suspended, and confessions may only be heard with a physical screen/barrier.
- 4.) All holy water fonts shall be drained and dried until further notice.
- 5.) Except for very small parishes, only those entering the Church through RCIA may be present physically for the triduum. All others may participate in triduum services via TV or electronic media.
- 6.) On Palm Sunday, priests will hold a short private service, after which people may pick up blessed palms, which will be made available outside of church.
- 7.) By April 15, I will make a determination regarding extending any of the above through the month of May.

"As we continue to battle this public health crisis as a Church and as a country, let us not lose sight of the fact that for us Christians, our ultimate peace and hope rests in Jesus Christ. Through the hard work of our dedicated health professionals, and with our cooperation and our faith in Jesus Christ, we will make it through the trying times that are sure to come over the weeks and months to come. Although these measures may seem drastic, our faith also binds us together in ways that run deeper than our public gatherings. Let us continue to pray for one another, and know of my fervent prayers for all of you during these times.

"Given at the Chancery Office, Diocese of Little Rock, this 12th day of March, 2020.

"Sincerely in Christ,
+Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock"

DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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