



## Diocese of Helena

**Date:** March 27, 2020  
**Re:** **UPDATE #4** — Diocesan Response to COVID-19

**Approved:** *+ Austin A. Vetter*

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In collaboration with Bishop Warfel of the Diocese of Great Falls/Billings and with the priests of the Diocese of Helena, Bishop Vetter is enacting the following regulations for the Diocese of Helena, which become effective immediately and continue until further notice. We will continue to monitor the situation and issue updates as necessary. Please note that this Update replaces and contains information from all previous updates.

**Stay at Home Order:** Governor Bullock has issued a ‘Stay at Home Order’ effective, Saturday, March 28.

- **All parish activities are suspended, parish offices and the Chancery will be closed as of March 28.**
- Beginning March 28, **Sacraments can only be celebrated in the case of extreme emergency, following appropriate safety protocols and procedures. Once the Stay At Home Order is lifted, Bishop Vetter will issue further directives based on the situation at the time.**
- **Parish Churches will remain open** for private prayer so long as no more than 10 people assemble in the church and social distancing is maintained.
- **All public Masses are suspended. The general dispensation for all the faithful from the obligation to participate at Mass on Sunday continues.**
  - **Masses Without A Congregation:** All priests are encouraged to privately celebrate one Mass each day, praying for their parishioners, and for those who are sick, care givers, first responders, and those who work to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus.
    - At a Mass celebrated privately, there may be, at most 10 people: e.g., the priest celebrant, one or two concelebrants, a sacristan, a server, a reader, musician.
- We invite everyone to **celebrate Sunday as a household church** by taking time to pray together, reflect on the Scripture readings, pray the Rosary, pray the Liturgy of the Hours, and make a spiritual communion.

- Generally, the Bishop will privately celebrate a **livestreamed Mass** from the Cathedral: at noon Monday through Friday; Saturday at 5:00 pm and Sunday at 11:00 am. You can view these Masses and links to other parish livestream Masses on the Diocesan website, [diocesehelena.org](http://diocesehelena.org).
- As long as the public celebration of Mass is suspended, '**Communion Services**' and **Eucharistic Adoration** are not permitted.
- **Communion to the Homebound** will be suspended due to the health risks to some of our most vulnerable parishioners. Parishes should establish regular contact, by phone, Facetime or other electronic communication, to those who are homebound to help them stay prayerfully connected to their parish.
- **Anointing of the Sick.** Priests are asked to be courageous and generously respond to those who are in proximate danger of death and request anointing and viaticum. The directions, procedures and policies of all medical and care facilities must be strictly followed when visiting the ill. The use of an instrument, such as a glove or cotton swab is allowed for the anointing. If you anoint a person who has COVID-19, outside a hospital, please check with your County Health Department with regard to self-quarantine.
- **Holy Week, the Sacred Triduum and Easter:** Bishop Vetter will celebrate privately the Liturgies of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter. These will be livestreamed on the diocesan website: [www.diocesehelena.org](http://www.diocesehelena.org): Palm Sunday at 11 am on April 5, 2020; Holy Thursday at 5 pm on April 9, 2020; Good Friday at noon on April 10; Easter Vigil at 5 pm on April 11, 2020; and Easter Sunday at 11 am on April 12.  
**For 2020 only and in keeping with directives from the Holy See:**
  - **There are to be no public celebrations of the Liturgies of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter.**
  - Pastors should celebrate Palm Sunday privately; at this time, **blessed palms may not be distributed.**
  - **Holy Thursday** – Pastors/Administrators may, but are not required, to privately celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper (only one celebration even if you are pastor of more than one parish), without washing feet, omitting any concluding procession and keeping the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle (in light of a Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments). The Holy Father has granted to all priests the Faculty to celebrate Mass "without people" on Holy Thursday 2020 and if unable to celebrate Mass, pray Vespers of the Day.
  - **Good Friday** – Pastors may, but are not required, to privately celebrate the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion; venerate the Cross with a profound bow (rather than kissing the Cross). Stations of the Cross may not be prayed publicly. If a parish wishes to allow individuals to pray Stations of the Cross privately in the Church, no more than 10 people may be in the Church at the same time, maintaining social distance.
  - **Easter Vigil** – Pastors may, but are not required, to privately celebrate the Easter Vigil (following the rubrics when there are no sacraments of initiation) and, in light of the Decree of the Congregation, the lighting of the fire is omitted, the Paschal Candle is lit, there is no procession, the *Exultet*

is proclaimed, the Liturgy of the Word, the renewal of baptismal promises — without the blessing of water, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are celebrated. Priests who do not celebrate the Vigil are to celebrate the Office of Readings.

- **Easter Sunday** – Priests should celebrate Easter Liturgy privately, praying in a special way for the people of their parish, especially any who are ill and those who have been exposed to the coronavirus.
- **The Elect and Candidates for Full Communion:** The celebration of the sacraments of initiation will not be celebrated at the Easter Vigil this year. Once Bishop Vetter lifts the restrictions, parishes can schedule and celebrate the sacraments of Initiation.
- The Diocesan **Chrism Mass** was celebrated privately on March 24 by Bishop Vetter. Oils will be distributed to the deans who will arrange for distribution to the parishes.
- **Funerals - The Rite of Committal** may be celebrated, but only with a total number of 10 people; no vigils and no luncheons at this time. Funeral Masses may be celebrated at a later date.
- **Keep in Contact with your Parishioners:**
  - **Website.** Ensure that the parish website provides up-to-date information. Utilize the parish website and virtual means for communication with parishioners. For example: announce livestreams; publicize on-line catechetical resources, prayer activities; etc. Present stewardship information and encourage on-line parish and diocesan giving. Parishes with the capability should livestream at least the private parish Mass offered on Sunday, respecting music copyright law.
  - Please make sure your **outgoing phone message** is updated and accurate.
  - **Consider calling your parishioners** and checking on them.
  - **Bulletin** – consider keeping some type of regular contact with your parishioners, like some form of a bulletin or regular communication; post it on your website, send it out by email.
- **Events:** At this time, please note the following are rescheduled or canceled.
  - The CYC Convention, it will be held virtually on March 27, 2020.
  - The Women’s Conference (April 18 - rescheduled to September 5, 2020).
  - Deanery Celebrations of Confirmation have been canceled – more details will come after Easter.
  - The Deacon Retreat (April 17-19, 2020) is canceled.
  - The Diocesan Business Day (May 14, 2020) is canceled.
  - The Kateri Institute (June 14-19, 2020) has been canceled.
  - **Activities scheduled after June 1, 2020, are “on hold.”** Decisions regarding these activities will be made in mid-May (or when other restrictions are lifted).

We are in this together. Know that you are in Bishop Vetter’s daily prayers.

**We will continue to communicate more information as it becomes available. Please continue to monitor the diocesan web site ([diocesehelena.org](http://diocesehelena.org)) for updates and helpful resources.**