



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 18, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My prayer for you and your family is that you will be kept safe from all harm. With the strength that comes from God, I encourage you to support your neighbors and friends with the Hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. Together, we face the threat posed by the Covid-19 outbreak - a crisis that is unprecedented in our lifetime. Still, there is a need to remain flexible and adapt to circumstances, following, as best we can, the guidance of public health officials.

Guidelines have been established that call for further limiting of public gatherings. Therefore, out of pastoral concern for all, and after prayer and discernment, as well as hearing from the priests and the Faithful, I **announce that the regularly scheduled Masses and other Liturgical events in Parish Churches in the Diocese of Venice will be suspended from March 20, 2020 until after Easter, when the situation can be re-evaluated. Visitation to Churches to pray is also suspended. Therefore, the Faithful and visitors to the Diocese are dispensed from any obligation to attend Mass during this period.**

This is acknowledged as a sacrifice for the Catholic Faithful, who have a great love for the Holy Eucharist and depend on the Most Blessed Sacrament for their spiritual lives. Do recall that Faithful Catholics, throughout the history of the Church, have kept the faith alive through trying times. By prayer and devotion, as well as spiritual solidarity with each other, the life of faith continued to be a source of strength and perseverance during persecutions and other times of public crisis. Tomorrow, on the Feast of St. Joseph, I will dedicate the Diocese of Venice to the care of the Foster Father of Jesus. Let us be united in prayer to St. Joseph for his intercession and protection.

Our Priests have been asked to draw upon the Church's rich tradition of prayer and devotion to ensure that the spiritual life of parishioners is nourished and remains vibrant through means which are prudently adapted to the current circumstances. Our Diocesan website has a list of opportunities to view the celebration of the Holy Mass. Parish websites will also provide other helpful suggestions for how to promote prayerfulness and spiritual communion.

Priests, together with the Catholic Faithful, are asked to make prudent decisions about Weddings and Funerals while observing guidance to limit gatherings. Baptisms will only be celebrated in cases of emergency. The Anointing of the Sick ought to be requested only in genuine need for the dying. Priests are to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and the Faithful when administering the Sacraments to the Sick (*i.e.* the use of isolation gowns, masks and gloves, as well as following the guidelines of medical professionals). All Confirmations prior to Easter have been postponed, along with penance services. Parish and social events, as well as ministry gatherings, are also suspended. Parishioners, in the event of emergency situations, are invited to communicate with a Priest, Deacon or available staff by phone, or by email.

As your Bishop, I am always edified and grateful for the generosity of the Faithful, particularly at difficult times. Of course, you must consider your own circumstances and how the Coronavirus outbreak has impacted your family. However, it is also necessary to provide for the ministry of the Church, as well as continue to serve the poor and the vulnerable through Catholic Charities. The Catholic Faithful are humbly asked to continue their generous support for our Parishes, Schools, Catholic Charities and the Diocese.

My dear Faithful, be confident that Christ is with us always and that the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph are interceding for us. Take courage and trust in God during this time of many challenges.

Sincerely yours in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank J. Dewane", preceded by a small cross symbol. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida