

## Memo

**To: Priests, Diaconate Community, Religious, Seminarians,  
Parish Staff**

**From: Msgr. Robert Siler, Chancellor**

**Date:** March 13, 2020

**RE: Public Celebrations of Masses Suspended  
in Diocese of Yakima; Dispensation Granted from  
Obligation to Attend Mass**

Bishop Joseph Tyson, in response to Governor Jay Inslee's announcement of an executive order expanding statewide the prohibition of public gatherings larger than 250 people, due to the coronavirus pandemic, has granted a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for all parishioners of the Diocese of Yakima, and all travelers within the boundaries of the Diocese on Sundays, for an indefinite time. Along with this dispensation he has suspended indefinitely the public celebration of all Masses in the Diocese of Yakima. While many parishes may never have Masses larger than 250 people, local health districts have recommended even stricter restrictions; for example, the Yakima County Health District has set the number at no more than 100. All Catholics in the Diocese, in a sign of our spiritual communion, are asked to accept this decision in the spirit of this Lenten season of sacrifice. Celebrations such as weddings, funerals and quinceñeras scheduled for Saturday, March 14, may be permitted on a case by case basis. Please contact the Bishop for permission through me, at [robert.siler@yakimadiocese.org](mailto:robert.siler@yakimadiocese.org) or at my cell number, (509) 494-2678. We are working to make the online catechetical resource FORMED available to all parishioners in English and Spanish within the next two to three weeks. Small religious education classes may be held through this weekend, but parents may choose to opt out their children out of the classes, and families should be reminded that no one how is ill, or who has been ill within the past two weeks, should attend (as a precaution).

At the same time, the positive message we want shared with the Catholic Faithful in our Diocese is that "the lights are on for you." This means our churches should be opened at set times each day for parishioners' private prayer; scheduled celebrations of Eucharistic Adoration, which could include well-organized and small Eucharistic Processions; and opportunities for private confession (all following proper hygiene conditions, building security protocols, city parade permits, etc.) Priests should

continue to celebrate the Eucharist privately, to pray for the Church, the world, our people, and for special intentions, and to be sure that adequate hosts are available for the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick or as Viaticum to the dying. Please be generous in your pastoral care, and prudent as well, to minimize the possibility of contracting or spreading illness, as we all struggle to adopt to the social distancing routines that will help us weather the coronavirus storm.

Bishop Tyson is developing further guidelines for pastoral care. We will publicize these as soon as possible, and discuss them with the Vicars and Executive Committee of the Council of Priests next week, to do any fine-tuning.

Please do your best to communicate this message as efficiently as possible to your parishioners, including notices posted on social media, sent out through parish email system, and signage posted at the doors of the churches.

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Copies to:

Office of the Bishop  
Finance Office  
Office of Canonical Concerns  
Catholic Charities

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