



MOST REVEREND JOSEPH R. KOPACZ, D.D., PH.D.
CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

**STATEMENT FROM BISHOP JOSEPH KOPACZ ON COVID-19 REGARDING SUSPENSION OF MASS
AND PARISH MINISTRIES EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY**

JACKSON (March 17, 2020) – In Solidarity with the Archdiocese of Mobile and the Dioceses of Biloxi and Birmingham, I announce today that Public Masses in every parish, school and institution in the Diocese of Jackson are suspended effective immediately until further notice. This decision was guided by health experts, the Center for Disease Control and the Mississippi Department of Health and in light of the announcements from President Trump and Governor Reeves. The situation will be reassessed at the beginning of April in regards to the Sacred Triduum ceremonies.

The following directives are established until further notice in conjunction with the above suspension and continue the directives from March 13:

- All gatherings in parishes also are suspended effective immediately until further notice, including faith formation, CCD, RCIA, Stations, Adoration, etc.
- All Penance Services, School Masses and Healing Masses are suspended as stated in the March 13 directives.
- For the foreseeable future, funerals should be simple graveside services with a small gathering and a memorial Mass may be celebrated at a later date.
- All public St. Joseph Altars are suspended.
- Weddings should consist of gatherings of 10 or less and must use Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be by appointment only and with six feet of distance behind a screen.
- The Diocesan Chrism Mass will be celebrated privately by Bishop Kopacz and oils will be distributed at a later date.
- Priests are asked not to travel outside the diocese until further notice.
- Diocesan staff will not be travelling, and some are set to work from home.
- Parish staff should limit in office visits and encourage business to occur via telephone or email.

As a Church Community we have an obligation to protect the common good and reduce and slow down the spread of Coronavirus in order to keep from possible exposure of those vulnerable and from overwhelming our health care system. We all are called to make sacrifices that will benefit others. Sacrifice is a part of our Lenten

journey and if one feels inconvenienced or wronged, offer it up for the poor souls in Purgatory and reflect more deeply on the sufferings of our Lord on the Cross.

From *Lumen Gentium* the Church Fathers teach: *The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.*(LG#11) During this time of sacrifice as we continue our journey in the desert with the Lord Jesus, I ask parishioners to renew and grow the domestic church.

As is instructed to parents in the Rite of Baptism: *In asking for Baptism for your children, you [parents] are undertaking the responsibility of raising them in the faith, so that, keeping God's commandments, they may love the Lord and their neighbor as Christ has taught us.*

This is a unique time in the life of our diocesan church and strengthening the domestic church through faith formation, prayer and spiritual growth in the home as a family and as individuals will bring us in solidarity with one another and the universal church.

We will be providing resources for you in the next few days on the diocesan website – jacksondiocese.org – to help with your faith journey. Many parishes will be live-streaming private Masses celebrated by the pastor.

I, as Bishop, will be celebrating Mass in the Cathedral privately and these will be streamed and recorded and available through the diocesan web site and YouTube. When a Bishop presides from his chair (ex cathedra), he is presiding over the entire diocesan church family. Therefore, I will be joining with each one of you as you make your Spiritual Communion.

Let us pray for one another during this time of sacrifice and remember those who have been affected around the world by this virus and by other forms of sickness, disease and violence. Let us pray for medical personnel to be guided in the healing of the sick and for them to be protected. Let us pray for those most vulnerable that by our acts of sacrifice we will protect them from harm.

I urge each one of you to exercise extreme caution and good sense as we strive to slow down the spread of this virus. You will be in my most fervent prayers for this current crisis to be lessened by our sacrificial actions.

Thank you and may God keep us all safe.

Our Lady of Sorrows...Pray for us.

St. Joseph, patron of the universal church...Pray for us.

St. Peter, patron of the diocese...Pray for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Joseph R. Kopacz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Joseph R. Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson