



Diocese of Belleville

Office of the Bishop

COVID-19: Liturgical Guidance and Parish Support Resources

March 24, 2020

The guidelines issued by the Governor J.B. Pritzker of Illinois, and our understanding of the status of the virus in Illinois, are changing frequently. Based on the current guidelines, Bishop Braxton and his Cabinet are deliberating about upcoming celebrations, including the Chrism Mass, Confirmation, Ordination, the Bishop's Golden Jubilee, the Priests' Jubilee, Graduations, and the Wedding Anniversaries Mass. They are in the process of determining whether or not these events will still be celebrated on the dates scheduled or will they be postponed and rescheduled at a later date. A decision will be made as soon as possible. **These decisions will be forwarded to you at once.**

Included here are the guidelines and resources provided to clergy and parish staff since the suspension of public liturgies on Friday, March 13, including guidance specific to:

- **Shelter-in-Place Guidelines** – these currently supersede all prior guidance until Governor Pritzker's order is lifted. Prior guidance is included so that you may have a record of what has been shared thus far.
- **Chrism Mass, Holy Oils, Holy Week and Easter**
- **Liturgy and Sacraments**
- **Livestreamed Masses**
- **Parish Offertory Support**

Note: Bishop Braxton's Letter on Suspension of Public Celebration of the Eucharist and Parish Guidelines are posted on the Diocese of Belleville [website: https://www.diobelle.org/our-bishop/writings/1392](https://www.diobelle.org/our-bishop/writings/1392)
Additional diocesan and school closure information can be found at <https://www.diobelle.org/our-bishop/writings/1392>

Shelter-in-Place

Governor Pritzker's mandatory shelter-in-place order for the State of Illinois means the following for our parishes effective 5 p.m. Saturday, March 21 through Tuesday, April 7:

- All churches and adoration chapels must be closed and locked until the order is lifted by the Governor. Private prayer in any parish building must be discontinued until the order is lifted.
- There can be no live Stations of the Cross or any other gatherings anywhere on parish/school property, nor can any parish personnel be involved in organizing them on any other site.
- All weddings and baptisms must be postponed and can be re-scheduled only after the order is lifted. There are no exceptions to this, regardless of the size of the group. However, in case of an extreme emergency for baptism, please seek the permission of your bishop.

- Funerals and wakes must be postponed until the order is lifted.

(**Note:** Priests can – and are encouraged – to continue celebrating Mass privately and to livestream their Masses for their parishioners, if possible.)

- Parish offices must be closed until Governor Pritzker’s order is lifted. That stated, each pastor and his staff must identify essential functions that need to continue as follows:
 - **Determine ongoing operations plan:** Though parish offices must close, parish staff should work from home where possible.
 - **Determine communication plan:** Ensure parishioners have a way to call and reach someone in person.
 - **Determine parish redundancy plan:** To prepare for an instance in which any staff members become ill, identify appropriate back-up for essential roles (payroll processing, communication management, minister of care, building maintenance, etc.).
 - **Determine security.** Specifically:
 - Identify and put into place all steps you can to secure consecrated hosts, critical parish/school records and files, essential assets and access points to your buildings.
 - Ensure all windows and exterior doors are locked and secured, and all interior doors are locked to the extent possible.
 - Any valuable or sacred items should be stored in locked cabinets or rooms. All parish buildings should be checked daily, including walking the interiors, to make sure they are secure and operating as intended.
 - Heat can be reduced but should not be turned off entirely.

While parish facilities will generally be unavailable to staff and visitors, appropriate staff needs to be present, at least periodically daily, to maintain building operations and safety.

Chrism Mass, Holy Oils, Holy Week and Easter

The Chrism Mass on Tuesday, April 7 will NOT be celebrated publicly in our parishes. (The Bishop will celebrate the Chrism Mass and the Holy Week Liturgies in the Blessed Sacrament chapel of the Cathedral of Saint Peter, which will be streamed for the benefit of the faithful to view in their homes.

Holy oils will not be distributed until the current health crisis is abated. Please continue to use your current oils stock until the new oils have been distributed.

Palm Sunday and Holy Week Liturgies – including Easter Sunday – will not be celebrated publicly in our parishes.

- There are NOT to be any public celebrations, even outside, including live Stations of the Cross on Good Friday.
- There are NOT to be any distribution of blessed palms. However, priests should bless the palms privately. Those palms should be reserved for distribution at a later date to be determined by Bishop Braxton.
- Easter sacraments for Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults candidates and catechumens are to be postponed – guidance will be provided later on when they might be celebrated after this crisis subsides.

- The Mass of the Lord's Supper (without the washing of feet), the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion, and the Easter Vigil will be celebrated by Bishop Braxton and the Rector in the Cathedral of Saint Peter without a congregation and will be livestreamed. If/when the Mass of the Lord's Supper is celebrated privately in your parish, it is not to include the ritual of the washing of feet.
- There should be no Communion services currently nor during Holy Week until we are cleared to return for public liturgies.
- **Note: Guidelines and restrictions on public liturgies and gatherings are inclusive of Easter Sunday and all liturgies after Easter until further notice.**

Confirmation

Due to the uncertainty of the situation, it is yet to be determined how the scheduled dates for Confirmation (April 14 to Pentecost) will be handled. In the meantime, please continue to meet with the *Confirmandi* through the various social platforms available and submit the required items to the Office of Worship. Further information will be forthcoming.

Spiritual Communion via Televised/Live-Streamed Masses

Televised or live-streamed, online Mass viewing is an opportunity for the faithful to remain connected to the Sacrifice of the Mass during this difficult time. Please share with your people the list of televised Masses available on the diocesan [website](#). If your parish is able to provide live-streaming of Mass from your church, please offer this to your parishioners.

Anointing of the Sick

The Anointing of the Sick must still be administered by priests to those seriously ill or in danger of death. However, priests administering this Sacrament must be in good health. All those administering sacraments to the elderly, sick or homebound MUST follow proper protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([cdc.org](#)) for handwashing and use of masks by those infected and those who are ministering to them.

Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound including Guidelines for Ministers of Care

- If the visit is in a hospital environment, follow the hospital directives regarding personal care (washing hands, etc.).
- If the visit is in a home, follow the guidelines below:
 - Wash hands or use a hand sanitizer once you enter the home
 - Avoid any physical contact with the person or family during the visit
 - Use a hand sanitizer again before distributing Communion
 - If the communicant usually receives Communion on the tongue, strongly encourage him or her, for your safety as well as his/hers, to receive Communion in the hand
 - Wash or sanitize your hands after the visit.

Maintain social distance (six feet) with everyone in the room, except the patient.
Do not offer comfort with any physical contact.

Ministering the Sacrament to Confirmed COVID-19 Patients

Restrictions for who can fulfill this ministry:

- No priest in the high-risk group (i.e., over 60)

- No priest with comorbidity; i.e., when two or more chronic illnesses are present. For example, hypertension, diabetes, Crohn’s disease, any cancers, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, COPD, heart disease.
- These restrictions are in place following the healthcare guidance that indicates younger, healthier individuals are at a much-diminished risk of contracting a serious case of COVID-19.

Religious Education, RCIA and All Other Ministry Groups

All classes, sessions and meetings are to be cancelled regardless of the number of attendees/participants.

Livestreamed Masses

Those liturgies celebrated by Bishop Braxton will be recorded for the entire diocese to view and can be found on the diocesan website, <https://www.diobelle.org>

Parish Offertory Support

Collections

Pastors should not be embarrassed or ashamed to remind parishioners that their financial support remains an integral part of parish life and the continued operation of our parishes and their mission of Christian service. Please encourage the Faithful to continue giving of their time, talent, and treasure at this difficult time. Encourage them to use online giving, mail, or drop-off their Sunday Offertory at the rectory or Parish Office.

Bishop Braxton, along with his Cabinet, in consultation with many others, including Physicians, has issued these guidelines. It is his expectation that they will be followed faithfully for the wellbeing of the people you serve and for our own. Since this situation is quite fluid, please be alert for further guidelines that may be sent to you by electronic mail. The Bishop asks that you share the appropriate parts of this information with your parish staff. You may post it on your parish website and share it in every way that is possible. He asks that you be patient with yourself, with one another, and with the Bishop and his Cabinet who are doing the best that they can to provide you with useful assistance.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and of each other.

March 24, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Peace be with you!

I write to assure you of my constant remembrance of you in prayer during these day of Lent which are unlike any Lent we have ever experienced before.

I pray often for you, your family members, and your parishioners with the hope that you are able to maintain good health by faithfully following the “shelter-in-place”, social distancing”, and “personal hygiene” directions that we have all received as the appropriate response to the spread of the coronavirus. We must all hope and pray

that these preventive measures will effectively diminish the presence of this serious illness in our communities. Only in that way will we be able to return to our familiar spiritual, social, and personal activities.

I ask you to continue to pray for me, and those who advise me, as I continue to seek to provide you with the best guidance in this difficult and, at times, frustrating situation.

The coming celebration of Holy Week, even in an abbreviated or modified form, is a reminder to us all of the central mystery of our Christian Faith. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to be our Savior. The saving presence of Jesus Christ, whose Resurrection we will soon celebrate, is the radical source of our hope, our confidence and, yes, our joy, even in times like these.

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward K. Braxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville