

DIOCESE OF FRESNO
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A Pastoral Message From
The Most Reverend Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.
March 18, 2020

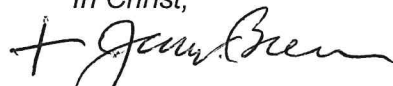
My Brothers and Sisters,

The early Church was, by definition and of necessity, a truly 'domestic' Church, though certainly not in the sense of being docile and tame; far from it. No, it was domestic in terms of being based in the homes and the hearts of the Christians of the first three centuries or so, Anno Domini. They prayed at home, they stayed at home and clearly wrestled with their own fears in the midst of persecution and, yes, even disease. In the midst of it all they learned how to be family together and grew in faith together. They learned how to suffer and sacrifice. They trusted in the Lord who they loved and knew as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, that is, as the Risen Lord! We do, too.

This week has been challenging for us all, to say the least. The situation with the Covid-19 virus seems to literally change on an hourly basis. It has been hard to keep up with and we do not know how long it will last. Through it all, at least for a time, we are perhaps being called to remember and to even imitate the faith and experience of our early Christian ancestors. While we painfully embrace a temporary fast from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in our churches, we can embrace as well the opportunity to beautifully maintain or, maybe for the first time in our lives, create a domestic Church. Our homes can be and ought to be places where faith flourishes through family prayer, through the reading of the Scriptures, through a home-bound commemoration of the Stations of the Cross, a recitation of the Holy Rosary or, above all, making a spiritual communion among many other possibilities. We can grow in the faith as we yearn for the Eucharist and begin, again, to hunger for it and to crave it with all our heart. It will make the day on which we once again celebrate and receive the Eucharist at a Sunday or weekday Liturgy all the sweeter. Ultimately and quite literally, the 'home' work we do now, as difficult as it is for all of us, has the potential for enhancing the living out of our Catholic faith. We will bring everything we will learn and experience in this time of trial to the altar of God. We will bring an even deeper appreciation for the Eucharist to the table of the Lord when the time comes.

As this situation continues to change and challenge us, we will also continue to give updated guidelines and instructions. Be patient and kind to one another. Above all, keep those suffering from the virus and those who care for them in your good prayer. Pray for this beautiful Diocese of ours, too. Lift up a prayer or two for me once in a while. Know that you remain in mine.

In Christ,


Bishop Joseph V. Brennan

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FRESNO

COVID-19 PROTECTIVE MEASURES

UPDATE AS OF MARCH 18, 2020


Approved by: Most Reverend Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.

3-18-20
Date Signed

1. Catholic Schools

The closure of all Catholic schools, including all preschools, has been extended for an indeterminate amount of time. Distance learning will continue Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. All fundraisers are also canceled until further notice.

If you have any questions regarding this closure and suspension of activities please call the Office of Catholic Education at (559) 488-7420.

See Addendum A: Frequently Asked Questions– School Closure – Distant Learning

2. Parish Life

The closure of **ALL** Churches, Missions and Stations; including all grounds and facilities such as chapels, halls, meeting rooms and classrooms, has been extended for an indeterminate amount of time. The Diocese of Fresno intends to notify the faithful and general public at least 7 – 10 days in advance of the date selected for the celebration of the Mass to be restored, along with other parish activities.

Information, resources, links to online Masses through our partnership with The CatholicTV Network and local diocesan productions may be found on our website at: www.dioceseoffresno.org. Also, the diocesan television station, KNXT, will remain on the air during this health crisis at least through May 2020.

3. Funerals

Funeral Vigil and Mass services should be postponed. A graveside service with the option of a Memorial Mass at a later date is **strongly** recommended and attended only by the **immediate** family. If a Funeral Vigil and Mass does take place, the same restriction regarding attendees applies. Immediate family includes: spouse, parents, grandparents and siblings of the deceased only.

Various counties or cemetery districts within the Diocese of Fresno may implement restrictions that will require parishes to adhere to even more restrictive guidelines/orders. Clergy will need to be as pastorally present as possible to the grieving families so that they do not feel abandoned by their Church.

4. Care of the Sick

We continue to pray for and care for the sick and the homebound in our midst to the best of our ability at these difficult times. Extraordinary Ministers to the sick should take every precaution if they choose to attend to a sick parishioner. Those same ministers should NOT do so if they belong to one of the at-risk categories of people either by virtue of their age or their own underlying health condition.

Priests should consider only visiting sick parishioners who are in dire need, that is, those who are seriously ill or in danger of death who have requested the Anointing of the Sick and perhaps in need of Viaticum. Again, as in all cases, every precaution should be taken by the priest in such circumstances.

5. Baptisms

Only emergency baptisms are allowed while the protective measures are in effect.

6. Confirmations

Scheduled Confirmations will be postponed until after the protective measures are lifted. At that time, Bishop Brennan will consider various options, such as: rescheduling where possible, combining parish celebrations or delegation of pastors.

7. Weddings

Couples with scheduled weddings should be encouraged to postpone. If a wedding is celebrated, only the priest/deacon, the bride and groom, their respective parents, and two witnesses may be present.

8. Quinceañeras

Scheduled Quinceañeras are to be postponed until after the protective measures are lifted or the blessing may be conducted with only the young lady, her parents and godparents.

9. Parish Office Staffing During Closures

Parish offices will remain closed until further notice. Employees who have the capability to work remotely are required to do so. When necessary, designated employees may come onsite to receive and respond to phone calls; however, the office must remain closed to the public.

The Vicars Forane will receive from the Pastors/Administrator the names and contact information for one or two employees at each parish site who will be responsible for assisting with receiving and responding to phone calls. The designated employees should be well informed of this responsibility. Parishes that do not have employees are asked to provide names and contact information for trusted volunteers for this responsibility. They will be added to the Chancery contact list for assistance in the event that assigned clergy cannot be reached.

10. Parish/School Employees

See attached Addendum B: *Department of Human Resources Frequently Asked Questions*

11. Social Services

Social Services such as Catholic Charities and parish-based programs/ministries to provide food for those in need will continue with the appropriate protective measures in place, as defined by state and federal agencies.

The reception and distribution of clothing donations and other items should be suspended until all protective measures are lifted.

12. Social and Restorative Justice Ministry

Chaplaincy is limited and volunteer ministry is suspended until further notice. Updates will be provided by the diocesan Office of Social Justice Ministry, as needed.

ADDENDUM A

Frequently Asked Questions– School Closure – Distant Learning

1. When did the planning for school closures and distant learning begin?

In mid-February the CA Catholic superintendents met to discuss, plan and share resources for the closing of schools due to the coronavirus. By late February principals were instructed to develop distant learning plans and send them to the OCE for review and questions. By March 11th I had reviewed all plans with my Assistant Superintendent, Donna Smith, who is in charge of Curriculum and Instruction. March 11th and 12th were practice days to see if every platform was working correctly.

2. Can all of our schools provide distant learning or just the ones with more resources?

All schools have the ability to offer online instruction for students from TK through grade 12. Every curriculum purchased by either the OCE or the schools in the last 4 years has an online component. Google Classroom and Zoom allow teachers to teach face to face with their students in a virtual classroom.

Sophia Institute allows teachers to offer Religion instruction daily to the students. All core classes are online and are teaching students virtually.

3. What additional financial burdens will the schools experience?

Many of the large fundraisers are being canceled or will have to be canceled as the self-distancing mandate is extended. The schools rely on this income to meet their budgetary obligations. Parishes cannot make up this short fall as they are struggling financially as well.

4. What if families don't have adequate technology at home?

All schools allowed families to check out Chrome Books or I Pads on Friday so that the children can receive their lessons online. These machines were all loaded with the educational programs and platforms that each child needed. Also, the firewalls and other protections are also on these machines just as if they were using them in class.

ADDENDUM B

Department of Human Resources Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do we need to pay our employees during this designated period of parish office/school closure?

Yes, at least for the foreseeable future. All employees, part-time and full-time, will continue to receive regular pay checks during the designated period of office closure. Payroll will be based on the most recent pay period (pay period ending March 10, 2020, for non-exempt employees and March 15, 2020 for exempt employees) with earning adjustments to be made once employees return to work. Employees will not be required to submit timesheets during this period. The Payroll Department will automatically process payroll based on pay periods listed herein. Parishes and schools are not required to submit timesheets, Form S or Form H.

At this time, employees are not required to use sick leave, vacation time or personal leave during this period. However, we are continuing to monitor state and federal legislation and employees may be required to use accumulated paid time off based on legislative requirements. Please contact HR staff by email if you have any questions. Our email addresses are as follows:

- Ralph Jimenez: rjimenez@dioceseoffresno.org
- Jennifer Campopiano: icampopiano@dioceseoffresno.org
- Matt Miller: mattmiller@dioceseoffresno.org

2. Will employees continue to receive Short Term Disability payments?

Yes, if qualified. All employees currently receiving Short Term Disability payments shall continue to receive this benefit. Employees will continue to integrate Short Term Disability payments with paid time off if currently doing so. Contact Charles De La Cerda if you have any questions. Mr. De La Cerda's email address is cdelacerda@dioceseoffresno.org.

3. Will employee benefits (health insurance, life insurance, long-term disability, etc.) continue as normal?

Yes. All employee benefits remain in effect.

4. Where are parishes and schools getting funds to pay employees during the designated period of office closure?

Assuming all revenue streams (plate collections, donations, tuition payments, etc.) continue as usual, payroll costs will continue to be covered for the foreseeable future. However, if parishes and schools are unable to fully cover payroll costs due to a disruption in revenue streams, or if state and federal government enact other requirements, we may need to change our level of employee compensation. If it

becomes necessary to modify or discontinue the extent of employee compensation, we will make every effort to communicate with our employees at least 10 days in advance of any major change. In the meantime, the Chancery, Finance Department, Vicars, and the Office of Catholic Education will continue to assess the impact of payroll costs as the coming weeks unfold. Pastors/Administrators and school administrators are asked to provide periodic financial updates to their assigned Vicar and the Office of Catholic Education.

Please note that the general assessment will be collected for March, 2020. At this time, we anticipate collecting a prorated assessment for the month of April. The matter of assessment payments will continue to be evaluated in the weeks ahead.

5. Do my employees need to stay at home?

Yes, at least during their normally scheduled work hours and as directed by civil authorities. Since employees will continue to receive their normal compensation, they are expected to be available to return to work at any time during their normally scheduled work hours. Any employee capable of working remotely and authorized to do so, will be required to work from home.

6. Can parishes and schools be minimally staffed to handle phone calls and email?

Yes. However, wherever practicable, all parish and school offices are to be closed during the designated office closure period. At the discretion of the pastor/administrator or principal, offices may be staffed with one employee to answer telephones, retrieve email and process mail. Offices should be closed to the public and parishioners.

Wherever possible, telephone voice messages should be set up to be retrieved remotely.

7. All personnel/employment related transactions (summarized below) have been suspended during the designated office closure period, with the exception of FMLA/Medical leave requests.

- Request for and preparation of employment letters and dismissal letters – suspended until further notice.
- In-processing of new hires – suspended until further notice.
- Preparation of counseling memos, written reprimands, and letters of suspension – suspended until further notice.

8. FMLA and Medical Leaves of Absences currently in place or being processed will continue subject to the existing terms and conditions of the leave of absence. Please contact Jennifer Campopiano, HR Coordinator, regarding new FMLA and Medical Leaves requests both associated and non-associated with the Coronavirus crisis.

While both state and federal legislative bodies are entertaining emergency measures to help mitigate the impact of disruptions in employment associated with the Coronavirus crisis, these measures may or may not apply to religious organizations. We continue to monitor new laws and regulations and will keep you apprised.

9. What if an employee is currently on paid administrative leave?

Employees on paid administrative leave continue to receive their compensation and benefits. Therefore, they will continue to receive paid administrative leave during the office closure period, unless informed by the pastor/administrator or principal, in conjunction with the Department of Human Resources, that their administrative leave has been lifted. Of course, at that point, assuming the office closure period is continuing, they would continue to receive their full compensation and benefits. Please contact HR if you have any questions.

10. Are employees allowed to go on vacation during this time? What if an employee already had a vacation planned during this period.

In theory, employees with previously authorized vacation leave may continue to use this leave during the designated office closure period. Employees are presently not being mandated to use vacation leave, sick leave or personal leave during this period. However, they are being required to remain at home during their normally scheduled work hours, potentially subject to call back. If they desire to travel out of town or out of state during this period, then they would have to transition from paid work hours to vacation time. However, given the travel limitations being enacted by civil authorities restricting the movement of individuals, it is doubtful that employees will be allowed to travel out of town or out of state.

If an employee has already been approved vacation time during the office closure period, they are not required, at this time, to use their accrued vacation while at home.

Again, we continue to monitor proposed state and federal legislation and based on actions taken, employees may be required to use accumulated paid time off (sick leave, vacation, and personal leave) during the office closure period. Please contact HR if you have any questions.