



Diocese of Austin

COVID-19 Additional Precautionary Measures

As your shepherd, I offer the following precautionary measures for the Diocese of Austin, effective March 13. In addition to what I outline below for the faithful, today I am sending additional guidance for parishes to respond to the coronavirus. Our attentiveness to community health is an act of charity and I call on all to cooperate in efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. I also ask the faithful to pray during this time of uncertainty for the intercession of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of this diocese, and St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church.

Liturgical Celebrations

Until further notice, Mass and Reconciliation schedules remain unchanged in our parishes. Also, parishes will keep their normal hours so the faithful are able to pray in the church. During times such as these, it is of utmost value to provide the sacraments and the assuring presence of God to all people.

Parishioners who are concerned about attending Mass due to their own health condition, or that of others, are excused from the Sunday obligation. Parishioners with a high risk of contracting a virus due to illness, age, chronic health conditions or a compromised immune system should remain at home and join the parish in prayer through a spiritual communion. This may also apply to caregivers.

Parishes are asked to develop methods for making Mass available via social media, either livestreamed or recorded. Check your parish website for more information. Visit our website for information on [broadcasts of Mass](#). You may make a spiritual communion at any time. Through a spiritual communion, we unite ourselves to God and the Church in prayer when unable to physically receive the holy Eucharist. Distribution of holy Eucharist should only occur within the celebration of Mass or a Communion Service.

Recently, I sent an instruction to all parishes temporarily modifying the manner in which we receive holy Eucharist (e.g. receiving the Body of Christ in the hand and suspending the distribution of the Precious Blood). This instruction remains in place.

Homebound Ministry of Holy Communion

I anticipate requests for homebound visits with holy Communion to increase. If you are unable to attend Mass and are in need of holy Communion, consult your parish. If your parish is unable to bring you Communion, make every effort to make a spiritual communion.

Other Planned Gatherings & Events

I have asked pastors to use prudential judgment when postponing or canceling parish events where large numbers are gathered, such as retreats, off-campus activities, overnight events, parish food events, festivals and others. Consult your local parish for the status of these events.

Religious Education & Sacramental Preparation

Until further notice, Religious Education programs will continue as scheduled.

Catholic Schools and Early Childhood Development Centers

The Superintendent of Catholic Schools will continue to consult with the principals and pastors of Catholic Schools on their schedules. Consult your school for updates.

For Early Childhood Development Centers, contact the center or the parish for updates.

Going Forward

I continue to monitor the situation in consultation with diocesan leadership, our parishes, and public health experts. I ask you to join me in prayer for those who are sick, those who care for them and those who are in distress during this time. Let us entrust ourselves to God who will never leave us to face our challenges alone. As an act of charity, let us work for the common good by observing these precautionary measures in our parishes, schools and throughout central Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe S. Vásquez".

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin