

Indiana's Catholic Bishops Suspend Sunday and Weekday Public Masses

EVANSVILLE, INDIANA – **March 17, 2020** – In light of new information and recommendations from health officials concerning the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency to stem the spread of the virus, the five Catholic bishops of Indiana have suspended – effective March 18 and until further notice – all Sunday and Weekday Public Masses throughout the Province of Indianapolis, which is comprised of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the Dioceses of Gary, Evansville, Fort Wayne-South Bend, and Lafayette.

Please email questions about any of this information to communications@evdio.org, and they will be routed to the appropriate diocesan department for response.

In making this announcement, Evansville Bishop Joseph M. Siegel urges all to continue to pray especially for the sick, healthcare providers, public health officials and all community leaders during the weeks to come.

The Diocese of Evansville also is taking the following actions:

Catholic Parishes – until further notice

- All weddings will be celebrated outside of Mass, effective March 18, 2020. Participation/attendance will be limited to the presider, the engaged couple, the wedding party and the immediate family of the engaged couple, adhering to CDC and governmental guidelines/regulations, keeping in mind any limit concerning attendance numbers.
- All funeral liturgies will be celebrated outside of Mass, effective March 18, 2020. Funeral liturgies may be held in funeral homes or churches. Participation/attendance will be limited to the presider and the immediate family of the deceased, adhering to CDC and governmental guidelines/regulations, keeping in mind any limit concerning attendance numbers.
- All baptisms of children will be one child at a time, celebrated outside of Mass, effective March 18, 2020. Participation/attendance will be limited to the presider and the

immediate family of the child being baptized, adhering to CDC and governmental guidelines/regulations, keeping in mind any limit concerning attendance numbers.

- St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville is developing a plan to offer Mass seven days a week on YouTube and other platforms. Other parishes may also be offering this service. More details will be announced as they become available.
- Churches will remain open for prayer, but the faithful are urged to practice social-distancing efforts to minimize their own and others' potential exposure.
- Parish offices remain open under their normal business hours.
- **Members of the faithful who are elderly, particularly those with underlying health conditions, and those with a comprised immune system or who are ill are encouraged to stay home and avoid any gatherings. They are encouraged to pray at home and/or watch a televised Mass if possible.**
- **All parish events were cancelled without exception effective at 8 a.m. local time on Monday March 16, 2020. These include – but are not limited to – religious education and RCIA classes, youth and young adult ministry events, meetings of parish committees and other ministries, parish fish fries and other fundraisers.**
- External events scheduled to be held in parish facilities (e.g. parish halls, school gymnasiums, etc.) should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Parishes should not commit to additional such events until further notice. Any such events are to adhere to CDC and governmental guidelines/regulations, keeping in mind any limit concerning attendance numbers.

Catholic Schools

- All Diocese of Evansville Catholic schools are closed. Here are the length of school closures by county, effective immediately:
 - Daviess – three weeks
 - Dubois – three weeks
 - Gibson – four weeks
 - Knox – three weeks
 - Spencer – three weeks
 - Vanderburgh – two weeks
 - Warrick - three weeks
- **Effective immediately**, all extracurricular meetings, school-sponsored events, fundraisers, field trips and non-essential meetings are **cancelled through Monday April 6, 2020**. The Catholic Schools Office will reassess the situation at that time.

Diocesan Offices and Events – through at least April 6, 2020

- Diocesan offices remain open.
- Effective immediately, all non-essential travel by diocesan staff is cancelled.

- Meetings of diocesan committees and other groups scheduled for the Catholic Center and/or Sarto Retreat House are cancelled.
- Diocesan events are cancelled until further notice, including the Souce + Summit youth and adult retreats.

Sacramental Concerns (Updated March 16, 2020)

General

- The most vulnerable populations should avoid participating in any of these events

Weddings

- All weddings would be celebrated outside of Mass with participation limited to officiant (priest/deacon), engaged couple, wedding party (bridesmaids and groomsmen), immediate family (no more than 10 total)

Funerals

- Funeral liturgy outside Mass may be celebrated at the church or at the funeral home, with participation limited to celebrant, immediate family (no more than 10 total)
- Rite of Committal at graveside may be celebrated with presider and immediate family

Baptism of Children

- All baptisms of children would be celebrated outside Mass, with participation limited to celebrant (priest/deacon), child, parents, godparents, and immediate family (no more than 10 total)

Reconciliation

- Communal Reconciliation services have been suspended.

Confirmations

- Confirmations scheduled through the end of May are postponed until further notice.

Mass Intentions

- Mass intentions can and should be fulfilled at Masses without a congregation as much as possible.

Additional Background

Continued Best Practices

- Vaccinations, good hygiene, avoiding sick people, and staying home if you are sick are the best ways to avoid transmitting the virus.

The local health department will let us know if further actions need to be taken, and then you will be notified as quickly as possible.

The Catholic Schools Office has shared the following information with students and teachers:

The Catholic Schools Office reminds teachers and students of the following preventive measures:

- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.*
- *If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.*
- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.*

The safety of students, faculty and staff is the Catholic Schools Office's first priority. The office will continue to update schools as necessary.

In addition to these steps, the diocese – including the Catholic Schools Office – recommends that people across the diocese follow the recommendations of their local health departments regarding additional precautions in their areas. The diocese also recommends following the general guidelines issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The CDC provides the following on its website (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>):

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.*
- *Stay home when you are sick.*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.*

- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.*
- *Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.*
 - *CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.*
 - *Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.*
- *Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.*
 - *If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.*

For information about handwashing, see <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

For information specific to healthcare, see <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/index.html>

The Message will continue to provide updates as necessary. Because our print edition is a weekly, please visit our website and social media accounts for the latest information:

The Message website: <https://evdiomessage.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CatholicMessage/>

Instagram: @themessageonline

Twitter: @messageonline