



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG
Office of the Bishop

March 18, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you are aware, because of the fluid and unprecedented nature of the Coronavirus crisis, our response to the threat posed by the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States has been to closely monitor the guidance of government leaders and public health officials, and to make appropriate and necessary decisions for the overall well-being of the faithful of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Now that guidance has been given to further limit gatherings, and out of deep pastoral concern for the most vulnerable among us, after prayer and discernment, **effective immediately, I have decided to suspend the public celebration of Masses in the Diocese of St. Petersburg until it can be determined that it is safe to return to normal schedules and public worship.** Therefore, the faithful of the Diocese of St. Petersburg and all visitors present in this diocese are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for as long as the suspension of public celebration of the Mass is in effect.

In addition, I have directed our parishes to postpone Confirmations, public penance services, parish and social events, and ministry gatherings (unless they are determined to be essential by the local pastor i.e. charitable ministries to those in need)

Together with your pastors and priests, I encourage the Catholic Faithful to make prudent decisions about Weddings and Funerals during this time, and to limit participation to immediate family members, in keeping with the guidance on public gatherings. Baptisms are to be celebrated in cases of emergency only.

I have asked our pastors to keep our churches open for private prayer and devotion, and to make every effort to keep the faith life of our parishes alive by creative means which are adapted to the current circumstances. I invite you to visit our Diocesan website for updates and for opportunities to view or listen to the celebration of the Mass. Along with our parishes, we will provide other opportunities to remain in spiritual solidarity during this period. Remember that Christ abides with us, and we can always be united in spirit and in prayer.

As your Bishop, I wish to thank you for your generous support of our parishes, the Diocese and Catholic Charities. I also ask you to continue your generosity, in light of your personal circumstances, so that our Church is able to continue its ministries and to serve the poor during this time of crisis.

During this time, I entrust the faithful of our Diocese to the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that by the grace of her Son we will be strong and courageous as we face the current challenges together. May God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "Gregory Parkes", preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg