



## STATEMENT FOR PRIESTS FROM BISHOP DA CUNHA

March 16, 2020

Out of concern for the health and well-being of all who reside in Southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the Islands and in response to the direction of public officials, I am suspending all public Masses and other liturgical services in the Diocese of Fall River effective Tuesday, March 17, 2020, and continuing until further notice. This includes Masses of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

At the same time, I am issuing a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass during this time to all Catholics of the Diocese.

Exceptions are granted for the celebration of weddings and funerals, but attendance must be limited to immediate family members only, not to exceed 10 persons. Every effort must be made to follow precautions already announced in previous communications from the Diocese along with recommendations of public health officials.

Please do not bring Holy Communion to homes except for cases of Viaticum.

I am asking that churches be open for limited time during the day to the extent possible and at the discretion of the pastor to provide the faithful who still wish an opportunity to visit for private prayer. Parishes should provide this information on their websites.

While I know it is important that we provide our people with some access to their churches, I want to reiterate the warning of medical officials that COVID-19 can remain on surfaces for up to 15 days and that its incubation period can be as long as 10 days before symptoms become evident. Accordingly, it is imperative that pastors ensure churches are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized after public hours. Also, I think it would be wise to have at least one staff person present in churches while open to monitor the visitation period and number of visitors. Hand sanitizers should be made available and social distancing practices put in place.

In our public announcement on this matter, I strongly encouraged our Catholics to pray at home and to seek out opportunities to participate in Masses available on television or online instead.

Pastors are encouraged to utilize technology to celebrate Masses for online viewing. In these instances, it is permissible for a very limited number of persons to assist with the Mass. When scheduled, please provide this information to our Diocesan Office of Communications so it may be posted on our diocesan website.

With regard to parish staff, it is advised that only essential staff members be present on site and that opportunities for working remotely be offered to others where possible.

The Mass is our central act of worship, the source and summit of our Catholic faith, and it goes without saying that this difficult decision was not made lightly. It was done after prayerful consideration of the critical health threat which now confronts us. The gravity of it demands that we all take whatever action is needed, despite the hardship, for the good of the protection of all, especially those who are most vulnerable at this time.

I ask that you please join me in prayer in these challenging days for all who are impacted by COVID-19 and in a special way for those who are sick and for those working to combat the disease.

I wish to entrust all our people, especially our sick and elderly, to the protection of our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of the Assumption, the patroness of our Diocese, so that under her motherly care we all may persevere in faith to support one another. Let us all pray that this may come to a quick end and normalcy may be restored.