



## The Dispensation from the Obligation to Attend Mass and Parish Liturgies

Diocese of Madison | Office of Worship  
March 12, 2020

Bishop Donald Hying has decreed that all Catholics in the Diocese of Madison are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays until further notice. In addition to the concern for parishioners' health, this also is being done as an act of charity to the rest of our community, where hospitals and public health entities are overwhelmed. The governor has declared a state of emergency and public health officials are encouraging people to suspend all public events that will have large numbers of people in attendance. By our action, combined with the action of many other denominations and organizations in the secular community, we hope to slow down the advance of this virus and protect the most vulnerable in our midst.

This dispensation applies to all Sunday Masses (including Saturday evening Masses of anticipation), for all Catholics, both those who use the Ordinary Form and the Extraordinary Form.

There are many practical issues that arise. Here are some answers to anticipated questions to assist diocesan parishes with their plans.

- 1. Isn't it a mortal sin to miss Sunday Mass?** Normally it is. The Bishop has decreed that *all* Catholics are dispensed from this obligation until further notice. This means it is not a sin to stay home from Mass.
- 2. Can I still attend Mass?** While no one is bound to make use of this dispensation or prohibited from attending Mass, Bishop Hying urges all the faithful to weigh carefully the decision whether to attend Mass, taking into account not only the risk to themselves but also the risk of spreading the disease to others, especially the most vulnerable, particularly in light of the fact that unknowing carriers of the virus may be asymptomatic.
- 3. Is there something I can do at home?** Yes! We want your prayer life to continue at home. You could read the Scripture of the Day (available at [www.usccb.org/readings](http://www.usccb.org/readings)), watch a televised Mass, pray the Liturgy of the Hours, pray the rosary or simply pray in your own words. The Office of Worship will post other ideas on its website ([www.madisondiocese.org/worship](http://www.madisondiocese.org/worship)) beginning on Friday, March 13.

- 4. Are all Parish Masses canceled?** No. Pastors, while they should continue to celebrate daily and Sunday Masses, may decide to reduce the number of Masses if warranted, being careful to communicate such decisions to the faithful clearly and with sufficient advance notice. Conversely, pastors may choose to add additional Masses so as to ensure that a smaller number of the faithful attend each Mass, provided that the norms regarding bination and trination are observed, again being careful to communicate schedule changes clearly with the faithful of the parish.

In particular, Bishop Hying is asking priests to periodically use the Mass formulary from *Masses for Various Needs and Occasions*. The two most appropriate are No 45: *For the Sick* and No 48: *In Any Need*, which has three separate sets of prayers. These can be used on some weekdays, but not on Sunday.

- 5. If I go to Sunday Mass, can I still receive Holy Communion?** Yes. No one is required to receive Holy Communion, but if you are properly disposed and want to, you may receive (with hands flat, if receiving on the hand; with tongue extended and head tipped slightly back, if receiving on the tongue, so as to avoid any physical contact with the minister).
- 6. Should there be liturgical ministers at each Mass?** We're leaving this to the discretion of the local pastor. If you livestream Mass on the internet or broadcast your Mass, you may choose to invite someone to be a lector or to play the organ. Please be sure that they are not in the categories of those especially vulnerable to this virus. If it is a "private Mass," liturgical ministers won't be needed. Since it is likely that few people will be in attendance or receiving Holy Communion, please do not use unnecessary Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Commentators, Gift Bearers, Greeters and Ushers, Cantors or Choirs.
- 7. I'm healthy and my Spirituality is very important to me. Couldn't I attend Mass?** No one is prohibited from attending Mass, but as mentioned above in no. 2, this defeats some of the reason for why we have taken this extreme measure. Please follow the Bishop's decree regarding this.
- 8. Should we still have choir practice or other such gatherings?** Again, the decision is left to the pastor and musicians of the parish. While smaller groups appear to be safer, singing in a choir usually involves a number of people in very close quarters with their mouths open, taking full breaths. Also, some choirs have a higher percentage of elderly, and they are at the greatest risk. However, choirs of all ages may wish to suspend rehearsals since they won't be singing at Mass.
- 9. How long will this continue?** We don't know. We hope that we will be able to celebrate Mass as a community soon. The decree says that this dispensation remains in effect until you receive an announcement from the Bishop revoking it.
- 10. It's Lent and I'd like to go to confession. Can I?** We're leaving this to the discretion of the priest, but confessions are permitted and certainly encouraged.

The Diocesan Office of Worship will prepare prayers and other suggestions for parishes and the people of the diocese. Please see our webpage ([www.madisondiocese.org/worship](http://www.madisondiocese.org/worship)) or Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/WorshipMadison/](https://www.facebook.com/WorshipMadison/)) for updates and other material regarding the liturgy.