

Archbishop Gustavo issues decree regarding changes impacting Catholic parishes and schools in the archdiocese in response to COVID-19

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Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, issued the following decree, March 13, 2020, to the people of the Archdiocese of San Antonio about required changes in response to COVID-19.

I am with you on our Lenten journey. At this time we are confronted once more with the fragility of our lives, and again we are reminded of our common humanity; that we are all one family under God. We want to face this crisis together. It is so important to be anchoring in our faith; to have God at the center of our daily lives.

In regards to COVID-19, the Archdiocese of San Antonio is trying to be pro-active rather than reactive to this rapidly changing situation, which especially impacts the most vulnerable.

In appropriate response to the current crisis, local, state and federal officials have been taking additional actions regarding this public health emergency. This morning, officials with the city of San Antonio and Bexar County announced that they were banning gatherings of more than 500 people, and strongly suggested that this measure extends to groups of 250 or more. In addition, this afternoon the Texas governor declared a state disaster declaration over the coronavirus. I am also enacting several measures impacting Catholic parishes and schools in the archdiocese.

While COVID-19 is unlikely to be serious for most people, we have an obligation to care for the very young, the aged, and those with underlying health issues. An effective way we can care for their health and safety is minimizing large group gatherings for the time being.

We are not taking these actions lightly, but with the realization that large gatherings are a factor in the spread of the disease; that there is a long lead time before symptoms present themselves and infection is known; that priests, deacons, and lay ministers could unknowingly transmit the disease to others, or congregants to one another; and that the saving work of Jesus Christ present in the Church is necessary at a time such as this.

DECREE

Conscious of my duty to prudently lead the Christian faithful of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, and in light of new information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local and state health officials regarding COVID-19 (coronavirus), and for the good of the Christian faithful and our community, I Decree that:

- 1) The Sunday Mass obligation is hereby dispensed for all Catholics effective immediately. Public Masses in parishes and other chapels shall be suspended starting this weekend of March 14-15, except for small groups at the discretion of the pastor, such as daily Mass. Presiding at wedding liturgies and quinceañeras is at the discretion of the pastor. We must bury the dead, and funeral services will still take place, with awareness of congregation size. Whenever possible churches will be kept open during the daytime for private prayer and Eucharistic Adoration.
- 2) All non-essential gatherings at parishes for the rest of March are cancelled or postponed, pending further notice. This includes but is not limited to previously-scheduled Confirmation ceremonies, and religious education classes. Communication on Catholic schools will follow.
- 3) We are advising against home visits at this time, but in situations of serious pastoral necessity these decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the pastor, responding to the best of these abilities to their requests. We must also follow hospital and nursing home guidelines regarding access as well.
- 4) I encourage viewing and participating in the daily and Sunday Masses via CTSA, other television outlets or through archdiocesan electronic media. Other devotions, such as perhaps praying the daily rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, are most appropriate during this time.
- 5) I will make a determination in consultation with archdiocesan leadership, health officials, and civil authorities regarding extending any of the above by March 31.

This Decree is effective immediately and remains in effect until revoked.

Accompanied by the Lord, who will sustain us through this tribulation -- and through the hard work of our dedicated health professionals -- we will make it through these trying times that may come over the following weeks and months. May all of these efforts help us to slow the spread of COVID-19.

I, as your shepherd during this most difficult time ask you to think of what you can do for others, and I invite you to pray:

Our Lady of Guadalupe, in these times of tribulation we turn to you O Mother.

**See with compassion the suffering of your beloved daughters and sons
affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic throughout the entire world.**

**Ask your Son to have mercy on us bringing healing to those infected and protection to all
your children.**

**Jesus Christ, Savior of all people, grant us courage to accompany and pray
for the entire world in the wake of sorrow and uncertainty.**

We seek refuge in you and according to your promise, deliver us from this danger.

Amen

Given at the Chancery of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, this thirteenth day of March, in the
year of our Lord, two thousand and twenty.

Sincerely in Christ,

+Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS
Archbishop of San Antonio