



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brownsville

1910 University Boulevard • P.O. Box 2279

Brownsville, Texas 78520

Tel. (956) 542-2501 • Fax (956) 542-6751

March 18, 2020

To the faithful of the Diocese of Brownsville:

After consultation with local government and health officials, the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese, with Bishop Eugenio Lira, Bishop of Matamoros, and with many concerned Catholics, and after imploring the aid of Almighty God and the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, I am directing the following:

The public celebration of Sunday Masses and weekday Masses in the Diocese of Brownsville is suspended effective at noon, Thursday, March 19, 2020, Solemnity of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. This directive remains in effect until withdrawn by the bishop. Furthermore, all Church events, such as retreats, festivals, and religious education classes, are also suspended until further notice.

As a reminder, and as I noted in my letter on March 13, all the faithful are dispensed from the obligation to assist at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days until further notice. Our diocesan website will include updated links to Masses live-streamed on the Internet, along with other resources for prayer at home.

These measures are taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in our local communities. It is essential that unnecessary movement and travel within the community be avoided whenever possible. The virus can be spread to places visited by those infected, even if they are unaware of their infection. It is also essential that gatherings in even small groups be avoided whenever possible, as direct contact can also spread the virus.

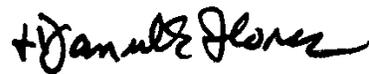
At this time, our churches will not be open to the public. This severe measure is taken with great sorrow, but for the sake of protecting lives, especially of the elderly and those who suffer illnesses that make them vulnerable to the virus. I ask you to pray with me that conditions will make it possible to lift this restriction soon.

Priests will continue to celebrate Sunday and daily Masses, only without the attendance of the faithful. It is important for Catholics to know that the Sacred Mysteries continue to be celebrated, and the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the efficacious enactment of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection in our midst. I urge all Catholics to unite themselves at home to this great mystery of the Lord among us. He is near to us even though we cannot now draw near to him in our churches.

During this time, funerals, weddings, confession, the anointing of the sick, and other sacramental celebrations will be celebrated only under severely limited circumstances and conditions. The Diocese will soon send to all pastors and priests specific instructions concerning these sacramental celebrations and other aspects of the ongoing pastoral care of the People of God in the Rio Grande Valley.

We will continue to follow closely the advice and directives of state and local health officials. In the meantime, as we work together as a community to delay and slow the spread of the virus, let us seek to incorporate the Rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, and meditation on the daily readings of the Eucharistic Liturgy. Of special importance is learning how to make a spiritual communion, and remembering to reverence the presence of the Lord in our churches, by making the Sign of the Cross whenever we pass by.

Our churches will take on the appearance and the experience of a prolonged observance of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. May our deep longing for the manifestation of the Risen Lord among us, especially on the day public celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice will resume, serve to prepare us for receiving him with gratitude and joy when that day comes, as surely it will.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel E. Flores". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores

Bishop of Brownsville