



MOST REVEREND JOSEPH R. KOPACZ, D.D., PH.D.
CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

Diocesan Announcement
Response to COVID-19
Church Closure through April 30, 2020

March 24, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

The current and anticipated surge of diagnosed COVID-19 infections in Mississippi and throughout the nation compels us **to extend the ban on all public gatherings in our churches in the Diocese of Jackson through April 30, 2020.** This is a critical time in our fight to flatten the curve of infections and this weighty decision gives witness to our commitment to the common good of our families, communities, state and nation.

It is disappointing to accept the reality that we will not be filling our churches throughout Holy Week, Easter, and early on during the Easter season. Yet, there are many positive signs that our mission to “proclaim Jesus the Savior by living the Gospel, so that all may experience the crucified and risen Lord,” is alive and well even in the throes of the current austerity.

Our leadership throughout the diocese, ordained and lay, are embracing the multiple platforms available to us to proclaim the Gospel and transmit the precious jewels of our Catholic faith into the lives and homes of the faithful. The Mass is available throughout the day, Lenten devotions abound around the diocese, and the Liturgy of the Hours, the rosary, adoration, etc. are feeding the flock daily.

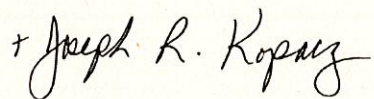
As Holy Week approaches, we expect to see a surge with such offerings as many parishes, schools and ministries increasingly become more savvy with the digital landscape. The extended time of closure impacts in the following ways.

- Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday will be live streamed from the Cathedral and in many churches throughout the diocese. The Vatican has released a valid abbreviated rite in the absence of a congregation. (Details will be sent from the Chancellor’s office shortly.)
- The Chrism Mass will be postponed.

- Palms will be blessed in our parishes, but we are not encouraging their distribution until a later date when the risk of transmitting the COVID-19 is greatly reduced or eliminated.
- Penance Services can be live-streamed, and all can ask and receive God's mercy from our hearths and homes, the domestic church. Parishes can continue to arrange for opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but the logistics of social distancing must be safeguarded, and all lockdown decrees must not be violated.
- The R.C.I.A. process with the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil will be postponed in all our Churches. These sacraments will be celebrated with the reopening of our churches.
- Confirmations will not be celebrated while our churches are closed. One option currently being explored is for me as Bishop to delegate to all pastors the right to confirm their Candidates in the parish church at a designated time. Pentecost would be a fitting feast.

I thank you for your attention to these important matters. In all corners of the diocese our Catholic faithful are being proactive, and we will continue to nurture and to live our faith as the Lord's disciples during these lean times. May our prayer for one another be faithful and heartfelt.

Yours in the crucified and risen Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Joseph R. Kopacz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Joseph R. Kopacz
Bishop of Jackson