



Statement from Bishop Mark J. Seitz, D.D. - Bishop of the Diocese of El Paso

Update on the Policy of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of El Paso in El Paso County

April 28, 2020

The Governor of the State of Texas has announced that the Stay at Home order that he set in place some weeks ago will be allowed to expire this Friday. The order superseded local government orders in the city and county of El Paso. However, the medical experts and our local leaders are telling us that in El Paso the onset of the community spread of the virus started later than the other large urban areas of the state. At this point we have not yet flattened the curve in our region.

There are other factors of concern to me. The large crowds urban parishes bring together add risk and complexity to protocols that would allow a safe opening. Pastors are also telling me that the availability of sanitizer is an ongoing concern. Shortages make the disinfecting of churches uncertain at this time.

The Church also feels a great responsibility to set an example to the rest of our community. Opening our churches would convey at this point a false sense of security about the risks of public gatherings here in El Paso. Many of our most fervent members are also people in the categories of highest risk, our senior citizens and those with underlying health conditions.

For these reasons the Catholic churches in El Paso will not be opening their doors at this time. Mass will continue to be celebrated daily with only those people needed for the celebration and broadcast of the Mass and that number will always be limited to 10 or less. Priests will still be available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation by appointment and for the Last Rites for those who are dying. Protocols are being finalized for hospital visits under these circumstances. Deacons and priests remain available to provide pastoral counsel and prayer over the phone. I might add that our Catholic Counseling office's professional therapists continue to offer assistance by phone and in person, all on a sliding scale according to a person's means.

It is our sincere hope that within weeks the prevalence of the virus in our community will be at such a level that will permit an opening of our churches at least for smaller gatherings and private visits. In the meantime I would ask all the faithful of the Diocese of El Paso to continue to be united in prayer. Take advantage of the many online offerings for Mass, prayer and ongoing education in your faith. Please continue to stay connected with us via the MyParish app available for all mobile phone devices. You can download the MyParish app by texting the word app to 88202.

We will look forward with great anticipation to that day when we who are brothers and sisters with the Risen Christ will joyfully come together in His presence to be fed by Him once again.

Bishop Mark J. Seitz, DD
Bishop of El Paso