

Dear Brothers & Sisters of the Diocese of San Joaquin,

A very blessed St. Patrick's Day to you all! St. Patrick is the very model of an Evangelist, Bishop and Child of God who, in the midst of incredible adversity surly and calmly shared the love of Jesus Christ and brought people to a saving relationship with him. Let us learn from his example and that of all the saints to be a calm and steady presence of hope and love in the midst of this global pandemic. Let us never forget that Jesus Christ is still the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I write to this morning, after our President, Governor and our own local authorities have strongly advised no gatherings of 10 or more people and, for those of you in the Bay Area, to shelter in place. Therefore, I am asking you to offer your worship services on a virtual platform rather than hold in person meetings. These are extreme measures I realize but for the health and welfare of everyone, and especially those at risk, I encourage the following steps:

1. Offer all meetings, bible studies, prayer groups etc. on a virtual platform. For millions of people, staying home will at first seem like a vacation but soon become quite a chore. Maintaining our routines as much as possible will be important. Connecting with your congregations will be vital and offering a bible study over a Zoom video conference or Facebook live will help to maintain a sense of normalcy.
2. For many of you using virtual platforms will be second nature but for some of you it may seem daunting. My office would like to assist those of you for whom this may seem difficult. Raul will be posting today step by step instructions on how to do this for Facebook live – it's not hard trust me if I can do it you can do it.
3. This week the Clericus' will be meeting virtually I encourage you to join in, pray with one another, learn from your brothers and sisters what they are doing to lead, minister and encourage in the midst of this crisis. I am asking the Deans to ask each of you to you connect with Fr. Berghuis, my assistant, or so that we can post it on the Diocesan webpage to direct people to you. For

example, if you are doing a Wednesday morning mass – let us know and we'll direct people to your link so that they can participate.

4. Of course, this does not take the place of receiving Holy Communion and so I want to encourage you to reach out to your congregations and bring communion to those requesting it. I will be posting later today on our website under “resources” a modified liturgy for this taking note that we want to maintain the best in healthy practices.
5. In addition to checking on your parishioners' spiritual needs do ask about their physical needs. This past Saturday while checking in on a parishioner at Our Lady of Guadalupe who has cancer I learned that he had no toilet paper and was low on essential foods. His wife had been to four stores and could find no toilet paper and only limited goods. Florence and I shared from God's provisions for us to assist the Lopez' through this week. Antonio and Cristina are not alone. Please check on your people and organize the church to assist one another.
6. Beginning today I will be offering daily Noonday Prayer via Facebook Live and I encourage you to join me or offer something similar for your parishioners.
7. Be sure to take care of yourselves! If you and your staff are able to work from home do so. If you need to be at the office be sure to practice all of the recommended precautions.
8. Lastly, remember to be a non-anxious presence in the midst of all of this. The 24-hour news cycle both informs and raises anxiety. The fruit of Satan is fear and division but the fruit of the Lord is peace and calm.

I'll close with the collect for Lent 2 which seems especially appropriate at this time.

“Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the

soul; through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

I pray for God’s guidance and peace for each of you and His continued blessing upon our congregations.

The Rt. Rev. Eric Vawter Menees