



MEMORANDUM
Office of Most Reverend Dennis J. Sullivan

From: Bishop Dennis J. Sullivan

To: All Priests, Parishes, Deacons, High Schools, Elementary Schools

Date: March 13, 2020

Re: **Statement of Bishop Dennis Sullivan regarding dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass**

In response to the recommendations of civic authorities, and regional and national health experts, I have decided to temporarily dispense all Catholics within the Diocese of Camden from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Those who are concerned that attending Mass may compromise their health and those currently suffering illness are not obliged to attend Mass until they are in good health.

I strongly encourage those who choose not to attend Sunday Mass to avail themselves of other opportunities by taking part in spiritual exercises in their home: watching Mass on TV, reading the Bible, listening to Catholic radio/podcasts, or praying the rosary.

It is important to note, that this decision to dispense with the Sunday obligation is not made easily. The communal celebration of the Mass is vital to the spiritual well-being of Catholics. Keeping Holy the Lord's Day is a commandment of God and of the Church.

This decision also takes a financial toll on parishes, as the weekly collection, which is the primary vehicle for maintaining our churches and providing ministries for our parishioners and the larger community in which the parish is located, will certainly suffer.

However, when faced with a pandemic situation as COVID-19, we must make every effort to protect those vulnerable to its damaging effects and curtail the spread of the disease.

I remind our pastors to maintain their present Mass schedules, no Masses are to be cancelled; to remain vigilant in administering all the sacraments; to make sure our churches are disinfected regularly and often; and to ensure the distribution of the Holy Eucharist complies with all proper germ-protection policies.

Additionally, parish events where attendance is expected to be larger than a few hundred people should be reconsidered, in line with New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy's recommendation (but not mandate) that events anticipating crowds of 250-plus people be canceled due to the potential spread of the coronavirus.

The Diocese of Camden will continue to monitor the situation. It is my hope this dispensation will be short-lived, but it will remain in effect until such time as it is appropriate to be lifted.

Let us pray that these efforts will help to diminish the spread of this virus. May we all pray during this time of peril for the elimination of this virus and for those who suffering from this unfortunate illness.