



Office of the Bishop
Roman Catholic Diocese of Lubbock

ABSENCE OF PRIESTS FROM PARISHES

PRIESTLESS WEEKENDS

The Diocese of Lubbock now finds itself with a critical priest shortage. The recent deaths of three priests, one pastor who retired to India due to terminal cancer, and the other two who were very active replacement priests when parish priests were away from their parishes, has left the Diocese without sufficient coverage when priests need to be away from their parishes. Therefore, the consultative bodies of the Diocese, led by Bishop Robert Coerver, Bishop of Lubbock, have established the following policies in order to allow priests of the Diocese to take their canonically stipulated vacation time, a total of 30 days.

- Canon 533.2 of the Code of Canon Law stipulates: “Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, a pastor is permitted to be absent from the parish each year for vacation for at most one continuous or interrupted month; those days which the pastor spends once a year in spiritual retreat are not computed in the time of vacation. In order to be absent from the parish for more than a week, however, a pastor is bound to inform the local ordinary.”
- Canon 905.1 of the Code of Canon Law stipulates: “A priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except in cases where the law permits him to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day.”
- Canon 905.2 of the Code of Canon Law stipulates: “If there is a shortage of priests, the local ordinary can allow priests to celebrate twice a day for a just cause, or if pastoral necessity requires it, even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.”
- Every parish of the Diocese will face the possibility of at least two weekends per year to be without a priest to celebrate Masses in the parish.
- In some cases the number of Masses might have to be reduced within a single parish for one or two weekends – provision will need to be made for overflow crowds (and livestreaming?).

- Mass times of neighboring parishes need to be published prior to the absence of a priest.
- Due to the proximity of parishes within Lubbock County, parishes within Lubbock County might be among the first to experience the absence of a priest and reduction of Mass times.
- When a priest foresees the need to be away from his parish for a weekend, the Office of the Chancellor is to be provided with the dates of the weekend and that office will be tasked with finding a suitable replacement if one is available. The centralization of this task is necessary to assure appropriate coverage of parishes throughout the 25 county expanse of the Diocese of Lubbock. In such cases, the Chancellor must be informed of the name and contact information of a designated person for the/each parish in case of last-minute changes, sick calls, etc.
- The Office of the Chancellor will determine if all Masses in the parish can be covered. If all cannot be covered the Chancellor's Office will stipulate whether and when a Communion Service will take place (Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest) or if a Mass or Masses will need to be cancelled.
- Deacons of the parish will be needed on some occasions to provide Communion Services in place of the celebration of Mass. The Diocesan Diaconate Office will provide for appropriate "Refresher Sessions" to prepare for optimal celebrations of the sort.

Participation in the full celebration of the Eucharist is the norm for Faithful of the Diocese of Lubbock, and is always to be given first priority when replacing a priest on weekends. Communion Services are a valid option in those extreme cases when it is impossible to supply a priest for Masses in a parish. No priest is to take upon himself the scheduling of Communion Services in place of weekend Masses without consultation with the Office of the Chancellor, except in the case of sudden serious illness.

ABSENCES ON WEEKDAYS

There will be numerous occasions when priests will be legitimately unavailable at a regularly scheduled time for a liturgical celebration, as well as occasions when a priest will be legitimately unavailable for a sequence of days (e.g. Monday through Friday one week). These occasions can involve illness, other commitments to meetings, special events, family events, vacation days, and even a weekly day off. When a priest is absent, provision needs to be made to assure that he can be reached in case of an emergency. The Faithful must have a means of contact so that the priest can be informed of the emergency

(electronic means, office personnel, a designated and publicized contact person, etc.) The means of contact needs to be published within the parish.

In the case of Eucharistic celebrations when the parish priest is unavailable, discernment must take place to determine what is the best course of action on behalf of the parish – obtain a substitute priest, arrange for the distribution of Communion outside of Mass, or cancel the Mass or time for Confessions.

- If it is determined that effort needs to be made to find a substitute priest, the Office of the Chancellor must be informed and the priest will work with that office to (hopefully) find a substitute priest.
- If it is determined that the distribution of Communion should take place outside of Mass, the ministry of a Deacon should be sought. If no Deacon is available a commissioned Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist may preside at the ceremony. In such cases the following liturgical rites and norms are to be observed:
 - The minister is NOT to sit in the Presider's Chair
 - The minister is to be vested in the normal vesture for the exercise of their ministry in normal circumstances (for Deacons, alb and stole; for laity, the dress that is normally worn when they distribute Communion at Mass)
 - The ritual to be followed is at the discretion of the Pastor:
 - The model of the Sunday Celebration is the Absence of a Priest using the readings of the day;
 - Communal praying of Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer with Distribution of Communion after the Intercessions concluded by the Lord's Prayer, and followed by the Gospel Canticle and Closing Prayer appropriate to the hour;
 - A period of Eucharistic Adoration including the readings of the Day followed by the Communion Rite;
 - An abbreviated Liturgy of the Word followed by Communion Rite and Dismissal;
 - Some other ritual determined by the Pastor; Communion is NOT to be distributed without some form of accompanying ritual, and should include the Readings of the day;
- If it is determined that the Mass or Confessions are to be cancelled, that information should be publicized as much in advance as possible, acknowledging that in the case of sudden illness that might not be possible. Consideration might be given to gathering the community without Distribution of Communion for some form of prayer at such times, including use of the Liturgy of the Hours, Proclamation of the day's Readings, praying of the Rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, etc.

The reality the Diocese of Lubbock is facing provides occasion for the refreshing of procedures and practices that can best serve the faith communities of the Diocese. The Diocese will need to sponsor training opportunities for the Distribution of Communion outside of Mass. Parishes might need to consider the availability of sufficient numbers of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. And throughout the Diocese, appropriate means of communication and notification need to be examined.

The current reality is an opportunity to encourage the use of youth and young adults in our liturgical celebrations, including as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. Any fully initiated person eligible to receive the Eucharist (Catholic in good standing) 16 year of age and older may be trained to serve as an Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. The use of young people in that ministry and in all other ministries of the parish for which they are qualified ought to be a high priority in the Church today. Young people are eager to serve, and they can be powerful witnesses to their peers and to all of the faith community when they are seen fulfilling a role of service, especially service at liturgical celebrations.

CONCLUSION

The Faithful of the Diocese of Lubbock are asked to be understanding and patient with their priests and with the Diocesan Administration as we navigate these difficult waters. The policies set forward above are intended to provide reliable celebration and distribution of the Holy Eucharist in the most feasible and respectful way possible. Our priests **MUST** take much needed time away from the stress of parish life for their physical, mental, and spiritual health. Together let us support them in doing so. **AND**, pray for vocations to Ordained Ministry, especially to the Presbyterate!

Given this day, December 17, 2025, at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, 4620 4th Street, Lubbock, TX 79416.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert M. Coerver". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "C".

Most Reverend Robert M. Coerver
Bishop of Lubbock