



DIOCESE OF DULUTH

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FURTHER EXTENSION OF MEASURES TO STEM COVID-19

May 1, 2020

Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker

To the Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Duluth,

Since COVID-19 continues to be a serious threat to the common good, the temporary measures enacted to protect against the virus are **extended through Monday, May 18, 2020**. As was said before, should the situation improve more quickly, these measures would be lifted at that time.

All public Masses remain suspended.

It is important to remember that, until the crisis passes, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been lifted. This will remain in place until it is safe for all to return to church.

At home, Sunday remains the Lord's Day so Mass can be followed on television, radio and online with a spiritual communion. Devotional practices such as an hour of silent prayer, the Rosary, scripture reading or other meditations can also mark the day.

At church, priests may continue to say a private Mass (Sunday and daily) without a congregation present, remembering their people at Mass. The Sacrament of Penance should be offered at regular times. Times when the church is open should be posted for those who may wish to come and pray before the Lord present in the tabernacle.

Gatherings of more than ten (10) people are not permitted.

Everyone is welcome to come to the church. However, if you are not feeling well, 65 or older, or have an underlying medical condition that puts you at risk for the virus, please stay home. In the church, please follow the signage in regard to social distancing (6 ft. between people is recommended). The use of masks is recommended. Frequent handwashing (20 seconds is recommended) and the use of hand sanitizers is expected. Church pews are sanitized regularly. Access to the priest and to the parish office should be posted in each parish.

Sacraments and Services and Devotions are still able to be celebrated.

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals may still take place as long as the measures concerning no giving of Holy Communion, hand hygiene, social distancing, and small groups are followed. The measure concerning no funeral receptions remains in force.

The sick and dying should continue to be cared for with requested visits, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum.

The practices of a Holy Hour or Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament may continue as long as enough adorers are willing to come and the above measures are followed.

Next Steps: A Three-Phase approach.

The Bishops of Minnesota and myself gathered yesterday after Governor Walz's speech to carefully consider our own phased approach back into having public Masses. We recognize that when we return to public Masses we will have to do so with carefully defined protocols in order to keep people safe and to prevent the spread of the virus. We know that if we work together we can do this safely.

We need to begin now to work with our priests and parish leaders so that we can be ready to begin some limited public Masses on May 18. We are developing a gradual, multi-phase approach to return to public worship. These phases will allow for the ability to re-evaluate the process as necessary in order to ensure the health and safety of the community going forward. Our plan presumes that throughout the state the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will continue until such a time that it is safe for all to return.

All phases of this plan anticipate that we are following strict guidelines for social distancing and sanitization.

We are currently in phase 1. During this time our churches can be open daily for prayer, and priests as they are able can provide for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Confessions can happen in spaces that are well ventilated with adequate social distance yet still assure the privacy of the sacrament. It is also permissible to have weddings with no more than 10 people and funerals with no more than 10 people.

We anticipate beginning phase 2 on May 18, and will work with state officials in a collaborative way to meet that goal. During phase 2, public Masses in churches will be allowed in smaller groups limited to no more than 1/3 of the seating capacity of the church (every 3rd pew) in order to allow adequate social distancing between those not of the same household.

Churches will have to develop ways to ensure that this capacity limit is strictly followed, such as online signups and ushers. Since there will be no Sunday obligation, Catholics will be encouraged to attend other Masses during the week instead of Sunday in order to spread out the numbers. More Masses will need to be offered in some cases to accommodate everyone in the parish who wishes to attend Mass.

We intend to publish detailed protocols to be followed for the celebration of Mass and the distribution of Holy Communion well in advance of May 18 when public Masses will resume so that parishes can get ready for the careful way we will have to move forward. Social gatherings and other small group meetings will not be allowed during phase 2 as they do not have the same

controlled movement as Mass. Some other sacramental celebrations may be allowed, but never exceeding 1/3 of the seating capacity of the Church. If a liturgical celebration or event cannot maintain the capacity and social distancing requirements, it may not take place.

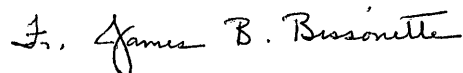
At this point, it is unknown when we would be able to enter Phase 3, which would provide more opportunity for us to have larger celebrations. We will continue to evaluate and follow the guidance of civil authorities and public health experts.

While acting in concert with the bishops of Minnesota, in our Diocese, I will ask the advice of our priest-consultors and the assistance of our pastors and other clergy to put into place the proper protocols here.

I ask your continued prayers for this effort and your patience as we move through the phases together. Hopefully, we will soon be able to gather publicly to celebrate the Mass, our greatest spiritual work.

St. Joseph, pray for us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. James B. Bissonette".

Reverend James B. Bissonette
Diocesan Administrator