



May 15, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Two weeks ago, I communicated with you that the bishops of Minnesota had decided to ask our parishes to plan and prepare for the opening of public Masses May 18, based on the indicated expiration date of Governor Walz's Stay-at-Home order. At the same time, the bishops proactively engaged public officials about the importance of some limited opening of our churches for Mass. A plan to resume public Masses in a limited manner on May 18—but only in places where parishes were willing and ready to follow a prescribed set of sanitization protocols—was submitted May 8 to the governor for feedback. Four Lutheran denominations joined our letter to Governor Walz. A number of other denominations and independent churches submitted plans May 8, as well.

To our disappointment, the governor and his administration have not yet engaged in dialogue with us on our proposal. While easing the Stay-at-Home order May 13, the governor's new Stay Safe Minnesota executive order explicitly prohibited faith-based gatherings with more than ten unrelated people. We are hopeful, however, because Governor Walz has called meetings of faith leaders for next Monday and Tuesday, to solicit feedback on a new set of public worship guidelines that his administration will be producing. The date of re-opening for religious gatherings of more than ten people is still uncertain.

We understand that these are difficult decisions for our civic leaders and that they have many factors to consider in the reopening of life in Minnesota. The bishops of Minnesota likewise have many factors to consider as we determine when to allow public worship with more than 10 people. As faithful citizens, our decisions will be guided by three principles: 1) love of neighbor and concern for the common good, including the health and well-being of our neighbors; 2) respect for public authorities and their directives and guidance; and 3) the rights of the faithful to the sacraments and the duty of worship we owe to God. The faithful can expect that we will weigh these considerations carefully as part of our common responsibility to the state, and that we will zealously protect our liberties to assemble and worship freely.

The bishops of Minnesota will together decide on a path forward and hope to communicate that to you by the middle of next week.

In the meantime, we will creatively work within the ten-person limit to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to come to Mass. If a parish is prepared to fully implement the stringent safety and sanitization protocols published May 9, it may begin

public Mass on Monday, May 18, respecting the ten-person limit. We expect that some parishes will not be ready to begin public Masses because they are not yet comfortable with, or able to implement fully, the protocols. Parishes should only return to a limited public celebration of the Mass when they are ready.

We know that many of you share our frustration and disappointment about the executive order's treatment of religious gatherings. We ask that you continue to pray for an end to the pandemic and for our civic leaders, and that you presume the good will of those charged with these important and difficult decisions. Let us ask the Lord to help us cultivate patience, serenity, and peace of soul during our continued Eucharistic fast - believing that God will bring many graces from our sacrifices.

Please continue to pray for our sisters and brothers who have died or have become ill from COVID-19, along with their loved ones, and for the doctors, nurses, health care professionals, first responders and clergy who are serving them so sacrificially.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Bernard A. Hebda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis