



## MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 29, 2020  
TO: Parishioners of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings  
FROM: Bishop Michael W. Warfel +BMW  
SUBJECT: Phase Two reopening of parishes for public worship

The announcement from Governor Bullock for Phase Two of Reopening the Big Sky to begin on June 1, 2020, has expanded our protocols for public gatherings. It is important to remember that even with a relaxation of restrictions, the need to practice safety remains, i.e., six feet physical distancing, the use of masks when physical distancing cannot be maintained and hand washing and sanitizing. The Phase Two protocols provide some adjustments. If circumstances do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing, groups of more than 50 people should be avoided. A number of counties in Eastern Montana have yet to have a recorded case of Covid 19, yet all it takes is but one infected person to visit a community and spread the virus. Dr. Deborah Birx from the White House Task Force stated that 35% of infected individuals will remain asymptomatic and may unwittingly spread the coronavirus for days. While many people seem to ignore protocols in any of a variety of businesses, it is my sense that the mixture of people who come to a worship service (i.e., the Mass), generally tend to be closer to each other (and want to be physically closer) than is experienced at a place of business.

Having been at several parishes in the last month, it is obviously difficult for people to fully follow the necessary protocols, but our efforts to follow the protocols and take them seriously remain. I am providing some adjusted directives made in consultation with the Priests' Council of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billing. A number simply repeat protocols from Phase One. They are effective June 1, 2020:

**The obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days continues to be dispensed.** Vulnerable individuals or those who have underlying health conditions should seriously consider remaining at home. Those who are sick for whatever reason should remain at home.

**The obligation to receive Holy Communion during the Easter season (Easter Duty) and to receive the Sacrament of Penance this year is dispensed.** While the 'Easter duty' to receive the Eucharist should be done within the Easter season, the Code of Canon Law specifies that 'for a just cause' this obligation can be fulfilled 'at another time during the year.'

**Parish Masses should continue to be open to parishioners. Some parish gatherings may be allowed but with all restrictions which includes any local governmental determinations:**

Physical distancing is required and the wearing of masks is encouraged when physical distancing is difficult to maintain at parish Masses or parish gatherings:

- Distribution of Holy Communion by in the hand is strongly urged out of care and reverence and in all charity for those susceptible to becoming infected by droplets being expelled via a previous communicant's breath. Communicants who require receiving Holy Communion on the tongue are asked to wait to receive last. I ask the priest who has distributed Holy Communion by mouth to wash or sanitize his hands before offering the Eucharist to the next communicant unless there is a group of communicants from one family. This is a temporary request out of concern for others.
- The invitation by the celebrant "Peace with you" and the people's response, "And with your spirit," should be made, but no further sign of peace among the assembly is to be offered.
- Given the physical distance from the assembly, the priest will not normally wear a mask while celebrating the Mass but should do so when distributing Holy Communion.
- Communion under the Precious Blood is not yet to be offered until further notice.
- For the Communion procession, communicants are to come up in a single file line, maintaining a distance of six feet from the communicant in front of them. If the communicant is wearing a mask, they are to remove it from their face prior to reception of Holy Communion.
- Social gatherings with food and drink, according to the judgement of the pastor, may be allowed after Mass or other occasions for under 50 while adhering to proper physical distancing.
- Parish gatherings may take place, such as, a parish council, Bible study class, a prayer group, etc. for under 50 people while adhering to proper physical distancing.