



DIOCESE OF DULUTH

2830 East Fourth Street • Duluth, Minnesota 55812-1501 • Tel: (218) 724-9111 • Fax: (218) 724-1056

May 15, 2020

Memorial of St. Isidore

To the Faithful and the Clergy of the Diocese of Duluth,

In a letter dated May 1, I communicated with you that the bishops of Minnesota decided together to ask our parishes to plan and prepare for the opening of public Masses on May 18, based on the possible expiration 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 public Mass. A plan to resume public Masses May 18 in a limited manner—and only in places where parishes were willing and ready to follow a prescribed set of safety and 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 declined to engage in dialogue with us on our proposal. While easing the stay-at-home order on May 13, the governor's executive order explicitly prohibited faith-based gatherings with more than ten unrelated people.

Governor Walz has called a meeting of faith leaders for Monday, May 18, to solicit feedback on a new set of public worship guidelines that his administration will be producing for churches and other houses of worship. The date of re-opening for religious gatherings of more than ten people, however, is still uncertain.

It is important for you, the Catholic faithful and clergy, to know that the Catholic bishops of Minnesota are united in their conviction that the decision of when to resume public Masses is ultimately ours, and not subject to the directives from the Governor or other public officials.

Just as we dispensed with the Sunday obligation and suspended public Masses voluntarily before any executive orders were issued, the decision to gather again belongs to us alone. Our decision 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.

Early next week, the bishops of Minnesota will together decide on a path forward, which will include identifying a specific date on which to return to limited public Masses of greater than ten people.

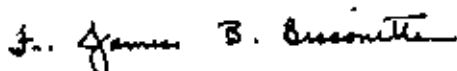
In the meantime, we will work within the ten-person limit to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to come to Mass. If a parish is prepared to fully implement our stringent safety

and sanitization protocols, it may begin public Mass on Monday, May 18, respecting the ten-person limit.

We expect that some parishes are not yet ready to begin public Masses because they are not yet comfortable with or able to implement carefully 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 sadness about the governor's decision to prohibit 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 and St. Isidore 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. We will communicate with you early next week, after meeting with Governor Walz, about the path forward.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. James B. Bissonette". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Reverend James B. Bissonette
Diocesan Administrator