



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

October 5, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

God calls us to be in relationship with one another. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common." (Acts 2:42-44) These words remind us of the importance of the Christian community. It is the place where we are nourished by Word and Sacrament.

Therefore, I am happy to announce the ability to open our churches in the diocese more widely. I have provided guidance to our pastors allowing them to admit to Mass the number of people they are able to safely accommodate while maintaining proper social distancing.

We have been able to safely and effectively return to public Masses for the last four months. Within this timeframe and across our 80 parishes, we are aware of only five people who have tested positive for COVID-19 after attending Mass. We have no reason to believe that any of these cases were a result of transmission at a parish. To safely maintain public Masses with an increased seating capacity, parishioners need to continue to follow our guidelines including wearing a face covering, practicing social distancing, and frequently washing their hands. Parishes will continue to ensure that high-touch surfaces are disinfected after every liturgy.

It is good that more of you will now be able to attend Mass. I also realize, however, that by maintaining proper social distancing, our churches still face some occupancy restrictions. I am extending the dispensation for all Catholics within the territory of the Diocese of Grand Rapids from their obligation of attending Sunday Mass through November 23 to address this concern.

I grant this dispensation to ensure that anyone who needs to stay home to protect the common good can do so in good conscience. If you are homebound, please contact your parish to inquire about the ability to have Communion brought to you. Mass will continue to be televised at 10 a.m. Sunday on FOX 17 and livestreamed on the diocesan website (grdiocese.org) and Facebook page ([Diocese of Grand Rapids](https://www.facebook.com/DioceseofGrandRapids)).

Those who are able to attend Mass should return, remembering that our physical presence at the Eucharistic table is irreplaceable. While this dispensation is in effect, all baptized Catholics are reminded of their obligation to keep the Lord's Day holy.

We entrust our prayers to the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes, patroness of those who suffer illness. Please continue to check the diocesan website: <http://bit.ly/GRdioceseCOVID19Updates> and social media for the latest information on our COVID-19 response.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids