



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

November 16, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

This year has been one full of darkness and anxiety for many of us. However, as we turn our liturgical calendar to this season of Advent, we remember our reason to hope. Jesus became one like us to show us, "the light shines in the darkness." Nothing can outmatch our Savior and His abiding hope, love, and grace – even if we do not immediately recognize it given our current reality.

Public health officials continue to remind us that where we are in the fight against COVID-19 is a much different place than where we hoped it would be at this time. We have continued to see an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. West Michigan now has one of the highest case rates in the State.

My desire was to be able to reinstate the obligation to attend Sunday Mass by this time; however, it is evident that is not a prudent decision at this point. Given the current situation and our restricted capacities for Mass, 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 January 4.

Public Masses and the celebration of the sacraments will continue with the appropriate COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place. Those who are able to attend Mass should return, remembering that our physical presence at the Eucharistic table is irreplaceable. These mitigation strategies need to be followed to ensure public Masses remain available. Your pastor will be making decisions about parish programming in accordance with State epidemic orders issued November 15.

I grant this dispensation to ensure that anyone who needs to stay home 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)). While this dispensation is in effect, all baptized Catholics are reminded of their obligation to keep the Lord's Day holy.

As we look forward to the day when we can all gather again, we remember, "May your mercy, Lord, be upon us; as we put our hope in you." (Psalm 33:22)

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