

## Diocese of Beaumont

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May 1, 2020

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

From Psalm 63 we read, "O God, you are my God; for you I long; for you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts. Like a land parched, lifeless, and without water. For I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips offer you worship."

During the past eight weeks or so, we can identify with David as he cries out to the Lord to fill the emptiness in his soul as he travels the desert of Judah. He feels helpless and alone, but he realizes that God is his helper and strength. As we go through our pandemic desert, we feel the deep need to be in communion with the Lord. We are filled with worry and anxiety over the sickness of a loved one dying alone in the hospital, or the loss of employment, or not being able to feed the family, and a multitude of other concerns. All of these increase the longing and need for the Lord.

What your pastors and I hear most often from you is, "When will we be able to resume worship in our church, especially receiving the Eucharist?". Not being able to receive the Eucharist, we have a better understanding and appreciation of the words of Jesus, "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." (John 6: 55-56)

In our Catholic Tradition, we are fed both by the Word from Holy Scripture and the Eucharist. During streaming of the Mass, we can spend more time reflecting on the Word of God. Through this Word, God is present to us. In Matthew's Gospel (18:20), Jesus tells his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in your midst." During these past weeks, two or more of you may have "attended" a streamed Mass together as a family. Jesus was present in your midst. Your living rooms became sacred space!

As civil authorities' "stay-at-home" orders expire, and they allow the limited re-opening of businesses and churches in phases, I also am deliberating a gradual re-opening of our Churches for celebration of Mass and other sacraments.

On April 29, 2020, I met together with the Presbyteral Council, College of Consultors, and Episcopal Vicars (most of whom are pastors), and consulted with physicians and others to discuss how and when to move forward. They provided wise and pastoral advice. As a result, I share the following:

1. We want to find a safe and simple way to accommodate the spiritual needs of our people.
2. We must pay attention to the increase/decrease of COVID-19 cases in Southeast Texas. As a result of the availability of testing, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in our area continues to increase. We have to wait patiently until there is a decline in the number of cases over a period of time.
3. We must be aware of the cautions and recommendations of the CDC, medical professionals, scientists, and civil authorities.

4. Whatever we do has to be dependent on what the virus does and not on a target date.

The Council, Consultors, Vicars, and I agreed to meet again in 3 weeks to assess the situation at that time and to consider a pathway forward.

*Until then:*

5. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays & Holy Days remains in effect until I revoke it.
6. The suspension of liturgical/sacramental celebrations and public assemblies remains in effect throughout the diocese.
7. Parishes that are able will continue to stream the private Mass of the priest (without the congregation).
8. Priests will continue to provide the other sacraments as stated in my Directives to Clergy on March 18, 2020 (which can be found on the diocesan website).

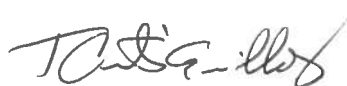
*I am, however, easing some restrictions at this time.*

9. Pastors may set days & hours when parishioners may drive through a designated area of the parish to receive Holy Communion (only in the hand, no chalice) while inside their vehicles. Parishioners are encouraged to "attend" a streamed Mass on the day they receive Communion.
10. Churches may be open for private prayer by individuals at a day/time designated by the pastor. (This is not to be a gathering of a group of people.) Social distancing must be observed, and attendees are highly encouraged to wear a face mask.
11. Regarding Funerals, priests may provide a Service of the Word or a private Mass at the funeral home for the family only. The policy of the funeral home is to be respected. Wearing a face mask is highly recommended. Some priests may choose to provide a graveside service only, due to their age, chronic illness, or other reason. (The option to have a private Mass in the funeral home is an exception to diocesan policy and is permitted only during this pandemic.)

In addition, I encourage you, if you are able, to continue to financially support your parish and the Bishop's Faith Appeal.

The words of St. Paul to the Romans (Ch. 12) have been a source of inspiration for me during this pandemic, and I hope for you as well--"Rejoice in hope, be patient under trial, and persevere in prayer." Let us pray for one another and be patient. The Lord will accompany us through these challenging times.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Rev. Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Beaumont

**Updated Directives for Pastors from Bishop Curtis J. Guillory following publication of his Letter to the Faithful of May 1, 2020**

1. The pastors are asked to follow the gradual re-opening plan I have provided in consultation with our brother priests.
2. I suggest that you do not compare parish practices, since our parishes range from a few hundred families to over 2000 families, nor with the practices of other Faith communities, nor with neighboring arch/dioceses.
3. Inform your parishioners that confessions will not be heard during the distribution of Holy Communion to them in their vehicles.
4. If any of your parishioners who are approved extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion wish to bring the Sacrament to a homebound family member, they must provide their own pyx when they drive through.
5. Suggest to your parishioners that saying the Rosary or other familiar prayers on the way to receive Holy Communion is a proper preparation, as well as thanksgiving afterward.
6. A priest has a choice regarding funeral services he provides. If a priest chooses to provide only a graveside service for a parishioner, be cautious about agreeing to provide services for non-parishioners who disagree with their priest's decision.

+ C. J. G.