

04 March 2021

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge:

Given Governor Edwards' recent announcement and changes to COVID guidelines in the State of Louisiana, a variety of questions have arisen because he has lifted the capacity limits for houses of worship (even though he has done so with the understanding that physical distancing and the wearing of masks will continue). Despite these new recommendations from Governor Edwards, it is my desire that our current protocols regarding pastoral life and worship remain the same. These include continued adherence to mask wearing, practicing physical distancing (accomplished by using every other pew), and retaining current protocols for hand and building sanitization as has been done over the course of this past year.

These measures that have been in place in different aspects of parish life since March 2020 have been instrumental in providing safe places for worship and parish community life within our diocese. It is my hope that with a declining spread of the virus and the growing number of parishioners receiving a vaccination, we will continue to lessen our restrictions for all Church gatherings so that these protocols will no longer be needed.

This time of transition that we are beginning will be a bit complex since it will probably not have a defined moment of ending and beginning. I have chosen a more conservative path for the diocese and its institutions at the beginning of this new phase, aware that some parishes and parishioners are struggling with the requirements of wearing masks and physical distancing. I also know that many ARE coming back to Church because of these practices. We need to move forward together. I encourage our clergy to continue with our present protocols for a few weeks to determine if changes are needed or warranted.

I thank our priests and deacons for their hard work and diligence in this difficult time; I thank the faithful of Baton Rouge for their continued fidelity to our Church and their cooperation in this ever-changing climate with news protocols. Let us work together for the health and safety of us all!

Hope in the Lord!

Most Reverend Michael G. Duca
Bishop of Baton Rouge