



CATHOLIC DIOCESE  
*of*  
**BATON ROUGE**  
Office of the Bishop

### **To the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge,**

For several weeks now, Catholics have been unable to participate physically in the celebration of Mass. Despite the empty pews in our parish churches, our local clergy are to be commended for **Continuing the Mission** and for bringing the Good News to others in new and various ways! We also thank our Governor John Bel Edwards and our local leaders for their clear communication and effective measures to slow the progress of this virus that have made the Phase One changes possible.

With restrictions slowly being eased, it is incumbent upon the Catholic Church to offer the sacraments and begin a slow, deliberate return to parish life while maintaining a safe environment. We, as a Church, must do our part to protect our congregants and assist in preventing the spread of this virus. Given the new directives from Governor Edwards, the following provisions will be in effect in the Diocese of Baton Rouge beginning 16/17 May 2020. ***Every pastor may start Mass with a congregation under these directives beginning with the Masses (including Saturday Vigil Mass) for Sunday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, but may choose to start any time after that with all parishes having regularly scheduled Masses by Sunday of May 24, 2020.*** These norms are open to further revision, expansion or restriction as circumstances change for our Diocese.

### **Sunday Mass Obligation Dispensation**

***The Sunday Mass obligation continues to be dispensed for all Catholics indefinitely.*** Those who are ill or who are not feeling well in any way should not attend Mass until they are free of their illness and its symptoms for three days. Those who are especially vulnerable (namely, those defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as those 60 years of age or older, those with comprised immune systems, and/or those with underlying health conditions), and indeed anyone who does not feel comfortable attending Mass are encouraged to stay home. Where possible, Sunday and daily Masses will continue to be streamed for those who are not yet comfortable, for any reason, with returning to a public Mass.

### **Celebration of the Eucharist**

Per the directives of Governor Edwards, our churches can resume services at 25% of the declared occupancy of the worship space in this first phase of re-opening. To accommodate these new directives will require the pastor to make the needed changes in ways that fit the individual parish's size and its resources. Some of the many decisions will include:

- Arrangement of seating so there is proper physical distancing (six feet apart in all directions, though families and those living in the same household can sit together);
- Possible temporary additions of more Sunday and daily Mass times to meet the parish needs;
- Deciding if a reservation process is needed, at least initially, to spread attendance over all the Masses available during the week.

Parishioners are required to bring and wear masks while in the worship space. The faithful are encouraged to bring small bottles of hand sanitizer for their personal use.

Pastors and their staffs have been encouraged by a separate communication to appropriately clean churches in order to promote public health. Pastors and other liturgical ministers, will observe proper hygiene.

To observe physical distancing, a bow or gesture should replace a handshake or other signs of peace during the liturgy. Also, at the conclusion of Mass, the same norms of distancing are to be observed by clergy and parishioners alike.

Priests, deacons and other ministers of Holy Communion will wear masks for the distribution of Holy Communion, and receiving the Precious Host on the hand is encouraged. There will be no Communion from the common chalice. The faithful are also encouraged not to come forward to receive Holy Communion wearing gloves.

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Regularly scheduled opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation can resume as long as masks are worn and proper distancing can be maintained for all while waiting in line and in the confessional.

### **Other Sacraments**

The previous directives of 17 March 2020 remain in place for Funerals, Marriages, Baptisms, Anointing of the Sick, and Eucharist to the Homebound, for the time being. As we become more confident in our new ways of gathering, I will give pastors more options for these Sacraments.

### **Parish Operations**

At the discretion of the pastor, parish offices may resume operating hours as long as no more than 25% of the parochial building is occupied. All visitors who enter a parochial facility must wear face masks at all times. The lay faithful are encouraged to conduct parish business, when possible, by phone, mail or email.

Gathering together under these new guidelines is a big undertaking by your pastor and parish staff. Expect that each parish will begin public Masses when prepared and will adopt different options that reflect the size of the parish, number of priests, available resources, readiness and parishioner support. I invite you not to compare what is going on in another parish with your parish's situation. Be patient with your pastor and accept that it will take a few weeks to accommodate this new reality.

By our continued cooperation our mission will advance, and we will journey together into an uncertain future filled with the strength of our faith and our Hope in the Lord.

In Christ our Hope,



Most Reverend Michael Gerard Duca  
Bishop of Baton Rouge

*Given at the Chancery of Baton Rouge  
11 May 2020*