



May 8, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Next week we will begin gradually reopening the public celebration of the Mass on a limited basis. I write today to give you some details and prepare you for our next steps.

We all long to be together at Mass to receive our Lord in the Eucharist. However, **we need to get this right, not rushed**. For this next phase, there will be limited, pre-determined attendance, social distancing, and other gathering precautions. We will all need to be patient and understanding as we adjust to these safety parameters. Charity requires that we remain committed to the protection of vulnerable persons and the whole community.

When may public Masses resume? Each parish is unique and needs time to plan to ensure that they are complying with various safety guidelines. Parishes should not reopen until they are ready. Parishes are encouraged to continue livestreamed Masses during this time.

- May 11 through May 15 -- parishes may begin opening Masses to no more than ten predetermined members of the faithful.
- May 16 through at least May 31-- parishes may begin opening Masses to a larger - but still very limited - number of pre-determined participants.

Who may attend Mass? At least through the month of May, Mass attendance will be pre-determined. **No Masses are open to walk-in attendance**. Each parish will adopt some system to manage this in the context of their local situation, which could involve invitations, reservations, and possibly tickets or attendance lists. Even if a Mass time is posted, please, do not show up at a Mass unless you are previously assured by the parish that you may attend that specific Mass.

Why are we limiting Masses to predetermined participants? The required social distancing means churches have a very **limited seating capacity** for each Mass. To avoid turning people away at the door, parishes will need to be specific in letting parishioners know in advance who may attend Mass. Please be patient and understanding as our parish leaders organize this process for you.

Who will be among the first to participate in these Masses during May? Members of the parish liturgy teams who need practice in implementing various protocols may be invited to attend Mass before others are invited to attend. Adults who were to be baptized at the Easter Vigil and first communicants are examples of special groups that may be invited to attend one of the limited capacity Masses.

Who should refrain from attending Mass? Those who feel sick, are vulnerable or at-risk with underlying medical conditions. In Indiana, until at least May 24, those over 65 years of age are asked to continue to shelter at home. **Until August 15, all members of the faithful continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass** (while we must all keep holy the Lord's Day). Those not attending Mass are encouraged to participate in one of the many livestreamed Sunday Masses.

What will be different when we come to Mass? Social distancing means we will be sitting apart from each other. Members of the same household may sit together, but apart from others. All attendees, out of concern for the health of all, will **wear face masks**, except when receiving communion.

Some things will likely be missing: fewer entryways open, no passing of the collection basket (leave your donations at designated location in the church or give online), no offertory procession, hymnals and missalettes removed from the pews, holy water removed from the stoups or baptismal fonts, **no physical contact** during the sign of peace (or holding hands at the Our Father), no distribution of the Precious Blood, and no social gatherings after Mass.

What will remain the same, or better, who will remain the same? *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."* (Heb 13:11) As the world seems turned upside down, Jesus is still with us. As our public celebration of the Mass has limitations, there is no limit on the love of Jesus and the power of the Eucharist. As the body of Christ may be separated physically, we remain spiritually united in Jesus.

On a more personal note, I certainly miss being physically present with all of you, my flock. You welcomed me so lovingly on February 11 and I launched a time of extensive welcome events throughout the diocese. A month later, things changed suddenly. What has not changed is that so many of you have continued to reach out and offer your support and prayers. Thank you for that support and know of my love and prayers for you.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.
Jesus, I trust in you...

Your Servant,
The Most Reverend Robert J. McClory
Bishop of Gary