



DIOCESE OF DALLAS

DECREE

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATION

On March 31, 2020, I issued a decree which extended until May 1 the suspension of Masses as well as provided additional guidelines for the Diocese during the Coronavirus pandemic. On April 27, 2020, the Governor of Texas issued standards for opening businesses and other institutions in the State of Texas. In particular, the Governor provided a number of protocols for resuming religious services, which emphasized protecting at-risk populations and ensuring proper social distancing measures.

As shepherd of the Diocese, and taking into consideration the guidance of civil and health authorities, I find it prudent to begin the process of opening the Diocese of Dallas in phases, maintaining the ability to re-evaluate the process as necessary in order to ensure the health and safety of the community. This process will likely occur in four phases, with each phase building on the last.

The following Phases represent broad goals and **are subject to change**. A decree will accompany each Phase to provide specific guidance. Phase One will begin at the date of promulgation of this Decree. There are no set dates for the other phases, although another Decree will be promulgated by May 18, 2020.

- **PHASE ONE: Scheduled Confessions** may resume with strict social distancing guidelines; the celebration of the **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for adults and children who had been preparing for the Easter sacraments but have gone without reception into the Church due to this pandemic as well as for infants can continue in limited numbers; and religious celebrations for families (**weddings, Ordinations, Funeral Masses, Quinceañeras**, etc.) may begin in small groups.
- **PHASE TWO:** The celebration of **public daily Masses** may resume, with protocols to ensure limited and restricted attendance in keeping with distancing and safety protocols as presented by and following civil and health authorities.
- **PHASE THREE:** The celebration of **public Sunday Masses** may resume, with limited and restricted attendance increasing over time, as presented by and following civil and health authorities. Even when Sunday Mass is available, the Faithful will remain dispensed from any obligation to attend Mass on Sunday because of the continuation of restricted attendance.
- **PHASE FOUR:** The celebration of **Sunday Masses at full capacity** may resume, with a return to a state resembling Catholic life before the beginning of the pandemic.

PHASE ONE

Therefore, at this time, with unanimous agreement of the priests who oversee each Deanery in the Diocese and following local civil and health authorities' guidelines, and out of a desire to help combat the virus and limit the flock from exposure or risk, aware that many events can by their nature attract large numbers of people, I hereby present this decree.

The following requirements apply to all limited gatherings and to the church building itself:

- **Gathering and Seating Requirements:** Groups may not exceed 25% of total listed capacity for church buildings and all social distancing requirements (six feet of separation) must be strictly followed when individuals are present in church buildings.

When the Faithful are seated in the church building, pastors will ensure that the Faithful keep at least two empty seats (or six feet separation) between parties in any row, except when two or more members of the same household sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or six feet of separation) empty on either side. Pastors must ensure that every other row is left empty. Which seats are available and which are closed will need to be indicated with clear signs.

It is strongly encouraged that those present in a church building wear proper face coverings, following local civil orders where appropriate.

- **The church building must be diligently cleaned and disinfected.** Pastors must train or have trained all employees, volunteers on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. Additional protocols for this are forthcoming, but diligent cleaning must occur after every gathering or event.
- **All Diocesan Safe Environment protocols** remain strictly in place.

The following are the limited gatherings that may take place. Note that the discretion of the pastor is paramount. The pastor is the best source for determining the practicability of any liturgical celebration or event at a parish. **If a liturgical celebration or event cannot maintain the Gathering and Seating Requirements stated above, it may not take place.**

- **Sunday and Daily Masses** remain suspended during this phase. Masses and other devotions will continue to be livestreamed. In addition to parishes, the Diocese continues to broadcast live masses and recorded events on the Diocese of Dallas website and local television. During such Masses, there will be an act of spiritual communion.
- **All Catholics of the Diocese of Dallas** remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass “on Sundays and other holy days of Obligation” (canon 1247). The requirement to receive communion during the Easter season (canon 920) may be fulfilled at another time during the year.
- The **Pastoral Center** is currently closed, with the goal of beginning the process of opening after May 18, 2020. Sacramental services (including the work of the Tribunal) remain functioning.
- **Parish Offices** may be opened at the discretion of the pastor, who is to make sure that all safety and social distancing guidelines are met for employees and volunteers as described in the diocesan re-entry protocols. These protocols will be provided to pastors and business managers.
- **Diocesan schools** will remain closed, and e-learning is to continue until further notice.
- **Eucharistic Adoration** of the Blessed Sacrament is permitted **at the discretion of the pastor. The church building** may remain physically open at times during the daytime hours for prayer **at the**

discretion of the pastor. The aforementioned Gathering and Seating Requirements must always be maintained.

- **The celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptisms, Confirmations and Eucharist) for both children and adults in the RCIA as well as for infants** may resume **at the discretion of the pastor.** These sacraments may include the presence of families and guests, so long as the Gathering and Seating Requirements are maintained.
- **Ordinations** will take place in the Diocese with the presence of families and guests, maintaining the above Gathering and Seating Requirements. This includes ordinations to the diaconate (transitional and permanent) and the priesthood.
- **Weddings**, including Convalidations, may resume with families and guests **at the discretion of the pastor.** The above Gathering and Seating Requirements must be maintained; the total number present may not exceed 25% of the total listed capacity for the church building.
- **Quinceañeras** may also resume with the presence of families and guests **at the discretion of the pastor** under the Gathering and Seating Requirements; the total number present may not exceed 25% of the total listed capacity for the church building.
- **Funeral services, including Funeral Masses, Wakes and Viewings** may resume with families and guests. The Gathering and Seating Requirements must be maintained.
- **For any liturgical celebration that includes reception of Holy Communion**, the following requirements must be met:
 - The Faithful (especially members of vulnerable populations) who are present at these liturgical celebrations are free to forego reception of Holy Communion at this time and make an act of spiritual communion
 - All vessels must be sanitized before celebration
 - Only priests, deacons and installed acolytes may distribute Holy Communion
 - Distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended at this time
 - Priests should sanitize their hands before approaching the altar prior to the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Deacons and installed acolytes should sanitize their hands before distribution.
 - Priests, deacons and installed acolytes should consider wearing face coverings during distribution of Holy Communion
 - Those receiving Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands before reception of Holy Communion and to receive Holy Communion on the hand
- **Scheduled Confessions** may resume with a schedule determined by the pastor. The pastor must diligently ensure that social distancing is maintained and that large groups do not gather while

waiting in line for Confession. Confessions are encouraged to take place in open spaces, even outside the church building, while always providing the option for privacy and anonymity.

- **Perfect Contrition:** Even if Confession may be available in a location in the Diocese, not all of the Faithful will feel safe in approaching the sacrament at this time. Therefore, the Diocese has published a resource on Perfect Contrition that should be helpful to the Faithful who are unable to seek the Sacrament of Confession. It is located [here](#). Perfect Contrition “obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to Sacramental Confession as soon as possible.”
- **All other parish gatherings** are to remain cancelled at this time.
- **Communion as Viaticum, Anointing of the Sick and Confession** are to be given in danger of death where possible. In the event where COVID-19 is indicated, please contact the emergency number (469-401-7717).

This Decree remains in effect until May 18, 2020 unless it is modified or revoked.

“[W]e rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” – Romans 5:3-5.

Given on April 29, 2020 in the Diocese of Dallas, the Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena.


+ Edward J. Burns
Most Reverend Edward J. Burns
Bishop of Dallas


Gregory Caridi
Chancellor