

DIOCESE OF MARQUETTE

1004 Harbor Hills Drive  
Marquette, Michigan 49855  
www.dioceseofmarquette.org



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

(906)-227-9115

fax (906)-225-0437

April 27, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Praised be Jesus Christ our risen Lord!

In this Eastertide, it is my hope and prayer that you are filled with the joy of the resurrection of Christ which renews the world.

As I mentioned in my column in *The UP Catholic* on March 12, the priests of the diocese and I have been meeting by video conference to discuss when and how to begin lifting the safety protocol that we have in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering those discussions, consultation with Catholic health care personnel in the UP, and prayerful discernment, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days will be rescinded effective the weekend of Pentecost, May 22-23, 2021. If you are unable to attend Mass, you may speak with your pastor who can give you an individual dispensation. Though the pandemic is not over, the level of risk due to COVID-19 is not as high as a year ago. The level of spiritual risk due to prolonged absence from Mass is greater.

In addition, the following safety protocol is in effect through June 15, 2021:

- Church capacity is limited to approximately 50%.
- Churches will be regularly cleaned and sanitized.
- Face coverings that cover both mouth and nose are required except for young children and those who cannot medically tolerate a face covering.
- Keep a safe physical distance of 6 feet from people who are not of the same household.
- If possible, bring hand sanitizer with you and your own cleansing wipes to wipe down the area where you sit when you arrive and when you leave. If you do not have hand sanitizer, wash your hands before you come to the church and after you leave. Avoid touching your face until you have washed your hands.
- Stay home if you are experiencing symptoms such as a fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, or any other symptoms of illness that could be transmitted or could compromise your health.
- Stay home if you have been exposed to a case of COVID-19 according to the quarantine protocol that is in effect. If you have had positive testing, stay at home until cleared by your doctor.
- Collection baskets should not be passed for the collection. Long handled collection baskets could be used if the handles are long enough for the ushers to keep a suitable distance.
- The congregational sign of peace may be exchanged only if there is no physical contact.
- Serious consideration should be given to omitting congregational singing. If there is any congregational singing, it is to be strictly limited. Choirs are to be limited to a quartet with the singers wearing masks and safely spaced from each other and the congregation. Cantors are to be safely spaced from the congregation. Keep in mind that due to the projection of one's voice when singing, singers must be positioned considerably farther apart than 6 feet.
- Holy Water is to be removed from Holy Water fonts. Parishes may make other safe provisions for the distribution of Holy Water, such as making it available in individual, sanitized bottles or touchless dispensers.
- Communion will be distributed under the form of the Sacred Body only.
- You are strongly encouraged to receive Communion in the hand as a temporary measure during the pandemic and as an act of charity toward the minister of Communion and the lay faithful in the Communion line.
- The principal celebrant and assisting deacon(s) should remove their face masks upon entering the sanctuary and keep a safe distance from other ministers as much as possible. Lectors may remove their face masks when proclaiming the Word of God. Servers and other ministers should wear face masks throughout the Mass and maintain a safe physical distance from other ministers as much as possible.
- The ciboria with hosts for the people should be set on a corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer. If the altar is small, the ciboria with hosts for the people should be covered.

- The celebrant, concelebrants and assisting deacon may receive Communion by intinction, or an individual chalice can be provided for each concelebrant and deacon. Communion should not be given to the faithful by intinction.
- All those distributing Communion should wear a face mask while distributing Communion. They should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after they put on and take off their face mask, before and after distributing Communion, and if they inadvertently contact the communicant, etc.
- The Sacrament of Penance is to be celebrated in locations that provide for the confidentiality of the penitent and safe distance between the priest and penitent. In general, confessionals should not be used because they do not provide adequate ventilation and safe distance.
- Baptisms, Confirmations, the Sacrament of Matrimony and Funeral Masses are celebrated with the same limitations on church capacity, physical distancing, etc., as indicated above.
- Mass and the other sacraments may be celebrated outdoors on church grounds.
- Outdoor prayer on church grounds is encouraged, such as adoration, benediction, rosary, May crowning, etc., provided that the people keep a safe distance of 6 feet.
- Parish gatherings that involve food service such as funeral lunches, coffee and donuts, etc., are permitted according to the health department regulations that are in effect.

Moreover, because the circumstances vary in different parts of the diocese, pastors have the discretion to implement additional safety protocol in their parishes, and to extend any or all the above protocol beyond June 15. Please consult with your parish for the protocol that is in place there. These are difficult decisions, and I give the pastors my full support for the decisions that they make in this regard.

I encourage you to seriously consider receiving a vaccination for COVID-19. It is morally permissible to receive the vaccines currently available, and it is a good way for us to show our love and concern for others by limiting the spread of disease in time of pandemic. I am fully vaccinated, and I am happy that I made that choice. I invite you to do the same.

As we celebrate the upcoming feast of Pentecost, let us pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit for our spiritual renewal and the renewal of the whole Church. Now is the time to grow more fervent in the practice of our faith, particularly in the celebration of Mass.

In Sacred Scripture, heaven is often compared to a wedding banquet. Yet we do not have to die to begin to partake in it. Every time we celebrate Mass, we are participating in the eternal worship of God, and we share in the heavenly banquet of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is not just a sign of Christ's presence. The bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, we receive Jesus himself in Holy Communion. We are joined to him intimately and receive grace beyond our comprehension. We cannot fully share in this banquet by watching it on television any more than we can share a meal with family and friends virtually. We must be present to participate fully.

To help illustrate the importance of the Mass, let us look at an event in the early history of the Church. During the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian in the year 304 AD, a group of Christians in northern Africa were arrested for celebrating Mass. The notes of the raid and interrogation have been preserved.

When the owner of the house in which the Mass was celebrated was asked why he did not prevent this from happening, he responded, "I could not because without the celebration of the Lord's Day we cannot live." These Christians were eventually put to death.

For these Christians, participating in the Mass was the most important part of their life. Jesus in the Eucharist was the source and summit of their lives. So important to them was participating in the Mass, that they died for it.

It has been some time now since we resumed the public celebration of Mass. If you have been afraid to return to Mass or have just fallen out of the practice of coming, be inspired by the example of these early Christians and come back to Mass. The Lord is inviting you to share in the heavenly banquet. Do not ignore his invitation.

How important is the Mass for us? The owner of the home said when asked why he did not stop the Mass from being celebrated in his home: "I could not because without the celebration of the Lord's Day we cannot live." Let us strive to say the same.

May the Lord bless you in abundance as you participate in the celebration of the Mass.

With prayers that your hearts be filled with the *Joy of the Gospel*, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend John F. Doerfler, STD, JCL  
Bishop of Marquette