



May 7, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As we welcome the good news about the decline in the number of COVID-19 cases and the relaxation of some restrictions by our State government, many questions have arisen about the manner in which we are celebrating Mass and general parish life. I want to update you on our protocols for safely participating in Mass and parish life.

Last March, because of the uncertainties of COVID-19 and to protect the most vulnerable among us, I suspended the celebration of public Masses and granted a general dispensation to all in the Diocese of Ogdensburg from the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. We resumed the celebration of public Masses last May, with limited capacities and strict protocols for social distancing, sanitizing, and wearing masks.

Thanks be to God, a good percentage of us have been vaccinated and the number of COVID cases has declined. This has allowed us to return to some degree of normalcy. It has become apparent that we can safely participate in Mass when we follow simple precautionary measures. Today I am releasing revised guidelines for parish life in the context of COVID-19. While keeping the general dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, we are able to modify our protocols in some important ways. You will note that we are encouraging servers, lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, ushers, greeters, and other volunteers to resume their service to their parish, while adhering to some precautions. We are encouraging a return to in-person parish group activities and outreach to the homebound, hospitalized and those in nursing facilities. We are changing many of the protocols for celebrating Mass, although the requirement for wearing face masks, social distancing and sanitizing remain in place. I thank all of you for your cooperation and patience with our COVID-19 mitigation practices to date, and I ask for your continued cooperation.

We will continue to monitor our circumstance and adjust our protocols as much as possible. I am hopeful that we will soon be able to lift the general dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation, but that time has not yet come. Although the State is eliminating the limitations on capacity for our churches, the requirement of maintaining a six-foot social distance from others who are not part of our family causes a *de facto* capacity limit that makes it imprudent to do away with the general dispensation at this time.

Let us seek the intercession of St. Joseph, asking him to protect us and guide our efforts to live out our faith. We remember in prayer those who are no longer with us and those who continue in their recovery. Asking God to bless you abundantly, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terry R. LaValley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley  
Bishop of Ogdensburg

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