



*Diocese of Fall River*  
*Office of the Bishop*  
*Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.*

May 18, 2020

Dear Fathers,

As I am sure you know by now, today, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker issued directives for the first phase of reopening some industries and activities, including houses of worship. After meeting with the Presbyteral Council this morning and discussing this important matter, I want to communicate to you what we have decided for now, while we work on guidelines to prepare our churches for reopening.

The reopening of our churches for public Masses and celebrations of Sacraments is complex and requires careful planning and implementation. What must be of paramount concern throughout the process of resuming public worship is the safety of our people, our priests, deacons and lay ministers.

It is very clear that we will need time for this preparation to ensure that all mandatory safety standards are met and that all churches have on hand the necessary supplies. It goes without saying, that the Governor is not mandating the opening of our churches, but rather declaring that we can resume public worship as long as the necessary safety measures are observed.

After much discussion and discernment among the Presbyteral Council, it was decided that in the Diocese of Fall River we will open our churches for public Masses on the Feast of Pentecost, beginning with the Vigil on Saturday, May 30th. Considering that many people, because of age or a medical condition, are advised not to come to church during this outbreak, or may prefer to stay home because of fear of becoming infected, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains in effect until further notice.

In the meantime, I encourage you to begin planning for reopening by calculating how many people can be safely present at Mass; how you will be able to determine a process to select who will come to which Mass, considering the fact that we need to keep the distance of six feet apart and that we can only accommodate 40% of the building occupancy; and how you will be able to provide for the cleaning and sanitizing of the worship space after every Mass, etc.

During this time, between now and Pentecost, the church should be open for those who wish to visit for personal prayer and adoration. It is also permitted to hear the individual confession of those who seek to receive the sacrament, during regular scheduled time, observing necessary safety measures.

As indicated above, a set of guidelines for liturgical practices (as we resume public Masses) is being finalized and will be forwarded to you upon completion.

Let us remain united in prayer, and in this effort to reopen our churches so as to be of service to God and His people in a safe, prudent and pastoral manner.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.  
Bishop of Fall River