



DIOCESE OF PORTLAND OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 15, 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With the resumption of public Masses, it has been wonderful to have the faithful sitting in the pews of our churches throughout Maine. Standing before assemblies, even socially distanced and limited by restrictions, is an experience that we may have taken for granted before the pandemic but will never again. For those who have been unable to return to Masses, please know that I have you in heart and mind as I look through the camera lens, praying that you are feeling the loving comfort of Christ as you await the day you can return to His presence in the Eucharist. I ask those in vulnerable populations to continue to give serious consideration to whether you should be participating in public Masses at this time or, instead, making your spiritual communion online or on television. If you do decide to attend, you might begin with daily Mass where there is less of a crowd. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in place.

Be assured, as well, that the diocese continues to make our collective voice heard before our elected officials as decisions are made concerning the gradual reopening of Maine. I share in your frustration with the many protocols that are necessary at this time, particularly the limits on large gatherings in our churches. It pains me to have to do this, but I do it voluntarily in order to work alongside our government and health care agencies for the common good, including the mandatory wearing of face coverings during all Masses. Please remember that we wear the masks for the protection of those around us. One of the ways we are called to be followers of Jesus is in the love and care we show to each other. Temporarily adapting some of our celebrations and services to promote the health and safety of everyone answers that call and, as always, I ask for your compliance and awareness that doing so protects others.

The vigilance to safety guidelines by our fellow residents has helped maintain low COVID-19 numbers in Maine. That response has been inspiring, as has the effort and boundless energy with which the Church in Maine has adapted to these extraordinary circumstances. The ongoing creation of online Catholic content, from the live-streamed Masses and adoration to virtual meetings and prayer groups, is overwhelming. The large numbers of viewers and participants in these online celebrations and gatherings has shown that, despite recent obstacles, our clergy and faithful are deeply committed to ensuring that the Gospel is always proclaimed.

God is good and his grace shines through whatever darkness we face. This, perhaps, has never been more obvious at any point in our lives than now. I want to express my gratitude to all who have continued to help spread the Good News and kept our parishes strong and growing through the constant sanitizing of our worship spaces and support offered to those in need. Thank

you to all of the clergy who have embraced the use of digital platforms to stay connected with our parishioners, maintaining these personal relationships even while remote. Thank you to parents who form the “domestic churches” throughout our diocese where you cultivate the faith of your children. Thank you to all our Catholic schoolteachers and staff who have worked tirelessly over the summer to ensure our schools will open in the coming weeks. Thank you to our school families for committing to our schools, places where their children become confident contributors of knowledge and faith in our world. All of your work and witness show the world that if we open our minds and hearts to hear and to see what the Lord wants of us, what the Spirit of God can do through us may well be limitless.

The ministries, initiatives, and direct assistance offered by the diocese and our parishes are crucial, perhaps now more than ever. Jesus calls us to look towards those who look to us and foster grace. I deeply appreciate the financial support you have provided to your parishes and the diocese. It is that support which makes it possible for us to continue our mission to walk daily with Jesus through our care for one another.

We celebrate in these days the beautiful feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. For us, this is a sign of hope. “Where she has gone, we hope to follow.” We ask, then, the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, and the Church, that she might ask the Lord Jesus to guide us to know best how we can serve in these times of uncertainty. May her maternal care assure us of the loving care of Jesus, her Divine Son.

With every prayerful best wish, I am

Sincerely yours in the Lord Jesus, our Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert P. Deeley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, JCD
Bishop of Portland