

To: Clergy of the Diocese
From: Bishop Curtis J. Guillory, Bishop of Beaumont
Date: May 21, 2020

Bishop Guillory's May 21, 2020 Memo to Clergy: Gradual Reopening of Churches

In my May 13, 2020 communication to you (Directive #4), I informed you that I was anticipating a gradual reopening of the churches the week of Pentecost, May 30-31, 2020. After the May 20 joint meeting with the Presbyteral Council, College of Consultors, and Episcopal Vicars, I have decided to move forward as planned.

The directives in my May 13 communication to you must be followed.

I recommend that you seriously consider implementing many of the suggestions provided in the resources below. Attached to my May 13 e-mail was FDLC Pastoral Considerations for Reopening of Churches and the Check List for Churches/Places of Worship by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

On May 19, you were sent the Road Map to Reopening Our Catholic Churches Safely, by the Ad Hoc Committee of Catholic Doctors.

On May 20, you were also sent the revised Minimum Standard Health Protocols for Church/Worship Attendees that were issued by the Texas Governor, Greg Abbott, on May 18.

From all of the above, there is an abundance of information and prudent cautions to assist you as you prepare to reopen your church. There are requirements to be met by those who attend church in person. These cautions and requirements, and those I have issued in the past three months, will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

In my May 20 joint meeting with the Presbyteral Council, College of Consultors, and Episcopal Vicars, there were several clarifications brought up which will be helpful for all of you.

1. Although the maximum capacity allowed is 50%, the reality is that by requiring social distancing of attendees and keeping every other pew empty, most churches will only be able to accommodate a much smaller percentage of attendees. So, I am recommending up to no more than 50%. Every pastor will have to implement these measures according to the unique circumstances of his parish.
2. At all times, social distancing must be observed. That includes entering the church, seating inside, going to communion, exiting the church, not gathering in the parking lot. Many pastors are blocking off the pews where no one may sit; marking the 6-foot distance in the pews; training the ushers & others to direct attendees according to the protocols. Given the space in the aisles, which may not be 6 feet wide, pastors may have to re-direct the path of the communion line. There must also be 6 feet between each person who is in line to go to communion.
3. Every attendee must wear a face mask while in church. However, authorities state that children under the age of 2 should not wear a mask. Parishioners who have been informed about this requirement to wear a face mask and still do not observe it can be prevented from entering the church. Ministers must wear the mask while distributing communion.

4. As we ease into reopening, pastors have the option of having fewer Masses than before the pandemic and/or scheduling Masses with much more time in between, so sanitation of the church can be done.
5. Pastors may continue distributing communion in the parking lot for those who are unable to attend Mass (as you have done since May 1).
6. It is highly recommended that choirs and singing of the congregation be avoided. Only an organist and a cantor (with social distancing) are acceptable.
7. Pastors are to use their discretion about when to schedule baptisms/receptions into the Church, first communions, confirmations, weddings, etc. All of the requirements above must be observed during these events as well.
8. It is too soon to allow any social gatherings. We want to move to a new normal one stage at a time.

I realize that all of this is a lot to manage. Restrictions, prudent cautions, and recommendations are all necessary for the sake of the COMMON GOOD. What one person does or does not do has an effect on other people. In this pandemic, it is the difference between keeping oneself and others safe and healthy or spreading the virus and endangering the life of others. This situation will not be resolved in a short period of time, so we must be patient as we all continue to minister to our people. Because of the uncertainty and fluidity of this virus, we do not know exactly how it will end. However, we move forward with uncertainty and with the assurance of our faith that the end will be for the good of all.