

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



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## **EMBARGOED**

### PRESS RELEASE

After three months, Bishop Walker Nickless has lifted the suspension on public Masses in the Diocese of Sioux City. Beginning with the weekend of June 27/28, parishes will open for Masses at the discretion of their pastors. Masses were originally suspended in an unprecedented move March 16 in response to the deadly and rapidly-spreading COVID-19 virus.

Since the suspension of the Masses in March, the Diocese of Sioux City COVID task force and Bishop Nickless have been monitoring data points locally, statewide, regionally and nationally, including new coronavirus cases, hospital bed usage, ICU usage, patient usage of ventilators, projections of the spread of the virus and other data.

As of the establishment of the task force, the benchmark the bishop and the group has used in order to make the decision to return to public liturgy and other public parish events has always been a 14-day consistently downward trajectory in the above categories.

Observations by the Sioux City Diocese COVID-19 task force and the four dioceses of Iowa COVID-19 working group suggest that the numbers are slowly falling in Iowa with the Sioux City diocese having the largest number of recent new cases of the four Catholic dioceses. The task force believes a plateau has been met, the downward trajectory has begun and that the area will reach the 14-day benchmark in the multiple categories between June 20-24.

Data and metrics will be constantly monitored by the task force until such a time a vaccine goes onto the market. If it appears that new cases, hospitalizations and other metrics begin to increase substantially it is possible that the diocesan churches and facilities will need to lock down once again.

Once the suspension lifts and public Masses begin under the discretion of the individual pastors, priests of the diocese and the faithful will be following specific protocols outlined in May by the COVID task force for attending Mass. The protocols will include spacing pews, mandatory face masks, availability of hand sanitizer at the entrances of church, and the use of social distancing.

The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains dispensed for Catholics in the Sioux City Diocese until the end of the calendar year. The elderly, more vulnerable and high-risk parishioners are reminded that although Mass is being offered it is recommended that they remain home at this time. However, Mass is open to all.

The June 27/28 suspension lifting by Bishop Nickless allows parishes, at the pastor's discretion, to authorize weekend Masses, weddings, funerals and events at parish halls and facilities as long as practices such as social distancing, use of face masks and proper sanitization are followed with guidelines as determined by state public health officials.

As of July 6, Bishop Nickless will allow parishes, with the pastor's discretion, to allow weekday public Masses two days per week. Also, churches may be open for two hours each day for five days per week, at the pastor's discretion.

As of July 20, at the pastor's discretion, parishes may return to their normal schedules.

The comprehensive list of the instructions for the resuming of the public celebration of Mass is available on the diocesan website at [www.scdiocese.org](http://www.scdiocese.org).