

May 13, 2020

Bishop Guillory's May 13, 2020 Directives #4 to Priests: Anticipated Reopening of Churches

My Dear Brother Priests,

As you are well aware, the most frequent question asked of us by our people is, "When will the churches reopen for worship?"

I hope the parking lot reception of Holy Communion is going well. During these challenging and fluid times, these are the kinds of adjustments we have to make.

On May 20, 2020, I will again meet with the presbyteral council, the episcopal vicars and the diocesan consultors to see where we are in terms of reopening. This meeting will take place after Governor Abbott announces Phase Two of the reopening of the State of Texas on Monday, May 18, 2020. At that press conference, he is expected to announce reopening to 50% capacity, including places of worship.

Keeping in mind that the planned reopening to 50% capacity could change, I am sending you my Directive #4 (below) to assist you in preparing the future of your pastoral care for your parishes and missions. Thank you for your service to the Church. Let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

+Bishop Curtis J. Guillory

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Directive #4 to the Pastors from Bishop Curtis Guillory, Bishop of Beaumont:

With this Directive, I provide you with my plan for phased reopening of the churches for Vigil and Sunday Masses, and weekday Masses, so you can plan prudently how to implement reopening, given the logistics of your parish plant.

This plan does not address reopening other parish buildings, or schools, and does not include chapels, e.g., adoration chapels.

1. Phased Reopening of the Churches on Weekends: (Also, on weekdays in a safe, limited manner determined by the pastor.)

I anticipate reopening the churches to 50% capacity (which includes the clergy, ministers and ushers) the weekend of Pentecost, May 30-31, 2020.

2. Attached are the two documents for your study, which provide measures to implement reopening churches:

FDLC Pastoral Considerations for Reopening of Churches, and Check List for Churches/Places of Worship, Texas Department of State Health Services.

I highly recommend that you have task groups to assist in preparing the church for each Mass, e.g., sanitizing, hand hygiene, social distancing, limiting the number of persons in the church, etc., and directing parishioners while in church and exiting church.

3. The Dispensation from the Obligation to Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains in effect for all Catholics in the diocese, until further notice.

There is no obligation to attend Mass, even though the churches will be reopened to 50% capacity.

It is still recommended that persons who are 65 and older or who are vulnerable or sick remain at home. They may wish to watch a streamed Mass and make a Spiritual Communion.

4. In Our Diocese (in addition to the recommendations in the documents mentioned in #2 above):

a. Masks must be worn by all attending church services, and by all ministers while distributing communion.

b. During the pandemic, Holy Communion must be received by the hand only.

c. Containers of sanitizer gel must be available for the ministers for use during distribution, and after.

d. The chalice will be available only to the celebrant(s). Separate chalices for each concelebrant.

e. Social Distancing must be observed except that members of a household may cluster.

f. Remove all books from pews so they will not need to be sanitized after services end.

g. If another service follows a service, etc., on the same day, the pews and chairs and other frequently-touched areas must be sanitized after each service.

h. If printed sheets (music, bulletin summary, readings) are provided, they must be removed by those attending or trashed after the services. Such sheets may not be used again.

i. Parishes are to continue streaming the Mass.

j. Due to the social distancing in churches, I recommend that the Mass be live-streamed to the parish hall for overflow attendance (observing social distancing), and Communion brought to them.

k. Pastors are to advise parishioners in advance of May 30 about the 50% limitation and safety measures, including not congregating outside the church/hall before and after Mass.

5. As a suggestion only, you may want to consider using the initial reopened masses for delayed baptisms and receptions into the church, then for first communions, then for confirmations, then for weddings and memorial Masses for the deceased buried only with a graveside service.

6. My previously published preventive measures and liturgical adaptations issued since March 2, 2020, remain in effect, except as modified by this Directive.