

**Date: 20 May 2020**

**From: Michael O. Jackels, Archbishop of Dubuque**

## **Re: reopening of parishes in the Archdiocese of Dubuque**

I am happy to announce that starting 30-31 May 2020, Pentecost Sunday, the parishes in the Archdiocese of Dubuque are able to gather for outreach to the poor, for faith formation programs, and for the public celebration of Mass and Sacraments. Thanks be to God!

This decision was based on receiving confirmation of our interpretation of the relevant data, namely, that there has been a 14-day downward trend in positive tests, hospitalizations, and deaths related to COVID-19 in the 30 northeastern counties in Iowa.

The priests in the Archdiocese of Dubuque are kindly asked not to start before the reopening date of 30-31 May 2020.

The parishioners in the Archdiocese of Dubuque are kindly asked to understand if Mass is not available locally, should the priest decide that it isn't prudent to reopen on account of his own compromised health situation, or because the coronavirus is still raging in the area.

The reason for the delay between announcing the reopening and actually doing it is to give time to take the necessary measures to ensure the health and safety of everyone. A checklist will be provided to suggest what needs attention in our parishes before reopening.

We're not yet out of the woods; the coronavirus is still with us. If we're not careful, it could come back with a vengeance. We will continue to monitor the data.

Our policy remains: err on the side of caution. That's why, at any gathering for outreach to the poor, faith formation, and worship we'll be asked to do things like wear a mask and practice social distancing, and at Mass, for Holy Communion, to receive only the Host, and in the hand.

Also, if we're sick, or frail due to advanced age, or have an underlying medical condition, or nervous about getting COVID-19, we shouldn't be gathering together *for any reason*.

With regard to gathering for a liturgy or a devotional in church, on account of social distancing, there will only be room for a smaller number of people to attend.

But not to worry, because everyone will still remain dispensed from the law to participate in Mass on Sundays and holy days, *until further notice*, probably when a vaccine is available. Those who want to receive Holy Communion can satisfy that desire at a weekday Mass.

When we open, remember to pray for those who died during the pandemic, and for those who haven't been able to grieve their passing properly. And pray, too, for people who are sick, for caregivers, and for those who live in fear for their lives and their livelihood.

Gathering for faith formation programs, and for public celebration of Mass and Sacraments are important practices of our holy Catholic Faith. But so is charity, inspiring our care for the poor, and our devotion to the common good, which inspires the precautions we're taking.

We eventually want the pews filled, and programs well-attended, it just might take some time. Prayers for the end of the pandemic's threat, as well as patience and cooperation are what's needed most right now. May God bless us all.

## **Re-opening of churches in the Archdiocese of Dubuque for the public celebration of Holy Mass and Sacraments**

Until further notice, Catholics in the Archdiocese of Dubuque are dispensed from celebrating Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, and from their Easter duty for 2020.

Receiving Holy Communion when gathered for Holy Mass with the holy community is an important practice of our holy Catholic Faith. However, charity is the supreme rule, which inspires devotion to the common good, which inspires the following provisions. Your patience and cooperation are most appreciated.

### **Please stay safe at home and do not come to Mass (this includes clergy) if you...**

- Are sick, or have recently been sick, or have an underlying medical condition
- Are frail due to advanced age
- Are nervous about contracting COVID-19
- Live with and/or care for someone sick, elderly, at risk, or with COVID-19
- Work at or regularly visit high-risk situations, where there are COVID-19 cases

Even if Mass is being offered in parishes, the above-mentioned folks should stay home, either to protect themselves or others from contagion.

### **Until further notice, parishes should take safety measures to prevent contagion:**

- 1) People should avoid mingling before/after gathering in church, and parishes should not host crowd activities, or events like funeral meals and wedding receptions.
- 2) Social distancing must be observed, that is, people are expected to keep their distance, about 6 feet apart, though people in the same household may be closer together. This will result in fewer people being allowed to congregate in church for Sunday Mass. Again, until further notice, Catholics here are dispensed from the Sunday obligation. The saintly desire to receive the Eucharist can be satisfied at a weekday Mass.
- 3) Whenever possible, physical contact should be avoided: when greeting people before or after Mass; passing a collection basket; bringing up bread, wine and the collection in a procession; at the Our Father; at the Sign of Peace; in the Communion line, if people ask for a blessing, or when distributing the Host in the hand.
- 4) Holy water fonts and baptismal pools should be emptied or covered.
- 5) Missalettes, hymnals, and other printed materials should be removed from the pews.
- 6) The number of liturgical ministers – Deacons, Communion Ministers, Lectors, Altar Servers, Cantor and Choir – should be kept to a minimum, or dispensed with altogether.
- 7) Only the Host will be offered at Communion time, and not the cup. Receiving the Host on the tongue is discouraged, for sanitary reasons. Communion Ministers may wear a mask to distribute the Host, but not gloves, and they should sanitize their hands before/after distribution.
- 8) Parishioners may be asked to help with sanitizing commonly touched surfaces in the church building (including bathrooms) before/after each celebration.

Other recommended, general safety measures are: wash your hands; don't touch your face; cough into your elbow; and wear a mask.