

D I O C E S E  
of NEW ULM

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**Office of the Bishop**

May 23, 2020

Dear Priests and Parishes,

I wish to let you know of an important breakthrough in our state that will allow for greater worship opportunities for all people. This breakthrough is consistent with our need to protect public health as we take significant precautions in how we come together and pray. In the next couple of days, Governor Walz will issue a new executive order that allows faith communities to accommodate 25 percent of seating capacity up to 250 people for worship services - both inside and outside - beginning May 27. Governor Walz and his administration hope that when faith communities gather, they will do so consistent with public health guidance. We pledge to be good citizens when offering worship in our communities and to work with public officials to promote the common good.

As you know, the Catholic bishops of Minnesota believe that the prior rules limiting faith-based gatherings to ten people unreasonably burdened the liberty of the Church to bring Mass and the sacraments to the faithful. Because we believe that the Eucharist is the bread of everlasting life and the source and summit of our faith, we were prepared to move ahead and allow larger Masses without support from public officials. The life of faith was receiving unequal treatment, as allowances were made for other, less essential activities. The new executive order removes that unreasonable burden on the Church and allows us to bring the Eucharist, the food of everlasting life, to our community.

Before I go further to talk about what this means for our parishes and community, please allow me to express my gratitude to Governor Walz, Lieutenant Governor Flanagan, and the other members of the governor's team. I am so thankful we could come to a consensus about a reasonable and safe path forward for our state that allows greater numbers of people of faith to safely return to worship beginning May 27.

I hope that the governor and his team have a better appreciation of both our duty to provide sacramentally for the good of our flock and our unwavering Catholic commitment to working for the common good. With the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life, it should not be surprising that the Church jealously guards its jurisdiction over the sacraments and entrusts to each bishop the responsibility to be "moderator, promoter and guardian" of the Church's liturgical life.

The bishops of Minnesota are also grateful for the help of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which provided sound legal counsel in defense of the liberty of the Church to offer the sacraments, especially in our conversations with the Walz Administration. Thank you also to the law firm Sidley Austin for its work on this matter.

Although we had previously announced that Mass could begin May 26, we need to move that back one day to May 27 to allow the executive order raising the allowed capacity for



gatherings to go into effect. We will also make small adjustments to our protocols consistent with the guidance that will be issued by the Minnesota Department of Health. The Pastoral Center staff will be sending the revised protocols and other materials to you as soon as possible. We can be thankful that the removal of the limitations will allow us to have Mass in the Easter season and come together on Sunday, May 31, for the celebration of Pentecost.

I need to make something clear about the return to Mass. The bishops of Minnesota have instructed pastors that public Mass should not be resumed in their parishes until the many safety protocols are in place – including sanitization and the changes to the liturgy, including the reception of Holy Communion. If a parish is not confident that they are ready, they should not open. Period. And if the faithful feel safer at home, the dispensation from the Sunday obligation continues to be dispensed. We also strongly encourage those over the age of 65 or who are especially vulnerable not to attend.

I express my gratitude to our priests, parish staffs, and parish leadership teams. Our priests have been on the front lines of the pandemic – ministering to the sick in their homes, hospitals, and care facilities. They have placed themselves at risk for the love of their brothers and sisters.


Finally, I express my thanks to the faithful of the Diocese of New Ulm. While unable to receive the Eucharist – the very Body and Blood of Jesus – for the past two months, you have creatively and patiently found other ways to live your faith. You have made spiritual communions, supported your brothers and sisters in need, supported your parish, and stepped-up to help others. And for those of you who are still unable to gather for the Eucharist – those most vulnerable and over age 65 – I thank you for your understanding and the many parishes for continuing to offer the Mass electronically.

Please remember to pray for all those who have lost their lives in this pandemic, for those who grieve them, and for those who are sick and care for them. Also, pray for the women and men in the health care field who daily risk their health to take care of our brothers and sisters who are sick. Please pray for an end to this pandemic.

And may God bless our country as we prepare to remember this Memorial Day weekend, those who fought for it.

Thank you.

In Christ,

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The Most Rev. John M. LeVoir  
Bishop of New Ulm

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