

Letter to the Faithful

APRIL 29, 2020

Cardinal DiNardo

Dear Brother and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

The past several weeks have been a great trial for our world and for our communities as we cope with the hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the great suffering of the sick and dying, many have struggled with isolation, financial hardship, and other stresses. For the Catholic faithful, this hardship has been compounded by the inability to gather for the Eucharistic celebration as well as the difficulty in receiving the sacraments or at times even being able to come to the church to pray. On one hand, this closure of churches to the public has been necessary for the safeguarding of public health, and we must continue to be mindful of the advice of governmental authorities. At the same time, I have heard the continued pleas of so many of the faithful and priests for access to the spiritual strength and nourishment of the sacraments after enduring so many weeks of stay-at-home orders.

Therefore, I believe the time has arrived to look forward to how this local church can cautiously resume some of its essential activities. Following Governor Abbott's announcement on Monday of his plan to allow a phased reopening of the state beginning on Friday, May 1, I have asked all parishes to begin preparations to allow for the reopening of our churches in a controlled manner. Effective this weekend, I have asked that all parish churches be opened for at least several hours each day to allow access for private prayer. Furthermore, I ask that parishes resume provision for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis, while respecting and complying with social distancing and sanitary requirements.

Due to the demanding (yet prudent) requirements of the state, the resumption of the celebration of public Masses will be more challenging. Beginning this weekend, I will allow (but not require) parishes to resume the public celebration of Masses. In light of the Governor's guidelines for the reopening of other buildings and institutions, including the requirement that social distancing be maintained and that no more than 25% of occupancy be filled, I have requested that parishes not resume public celebration of the Mass until they have implemented policies and procedures consistent with my guidelines, which are a reflection of Governor Abbott's orders. I have suggested that each parish form a pandemic response team to assist in developing protocols to follow the guidelines. Since massive efforts for the provision of safe and sterile spaces must be undertaken, some parishes may need longer than others to be able to prudently meet this need. I ask that you be patient and cooperative with your priests and parishes as they work to provide for your spiritual needs while

taking the necessary precautions to protect you and the common good. I would further ask that you be collaborative with them as they will likely need a lot of help from many volunteers to make all of this possible.

I also ask that you cooperate with your parishes in following an instruction which I have given for the whole Archdiocese. I am asking that during this time of gradual reopening, all people coming to churches, including clergy and staff, wear masks to cover their noses and mouths. This helps diminish widespread exposure if an infected person were to sneeze, cough, or in any manner spread airborne contamination, especially at a time when others are gathered.

In the meanwhile, I gently remind you that **the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days remains suspended**. It is still recommended that people, especially those who are 65 and older or are vulnerable, should remain at home and participate by livestream. Even more urgently, if you have any reason to believe you might be sick or exposed to COVID-19, please remain at home as an act of charity to others! I have asked our parishes to maintain the livestreaming that they have adopted during the past several weeks. Furthermore, since it still will not be possible for all people to come to Mass on Sundays, I ask that the faithful be flexible in considering attendance on a different day of the week. We are still limited in our ability to fully congregate, but the most important consideration is the faithful have access to Eucharist and Confession.

Let us remain united in prayer for one another and especially for those on the front lines, who continue to work and put themselves in harm's way for the provision for the welfare of all of us. With Easter greetings, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston-Houston