



DIocese of GAYLORD

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Greetings in the Risen Lord! The First Letter of St Peter exhorts us: "There is cause for rejoicing here. You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials: but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ appears." These past few months, I pray, have helped us to realize and cherish our faith, family and friends with even greater intensity.

It has been two months since we last celebrated public Masses together in our parishes, shrines and chapels across the Diocese of Gaylord. With this public statement I share with you the good news that we are at a stage of beginning to re-open our churches for public celebrations of the Eucharist beginning on Wednesday, May 20. Churches should not open, if they are not ready to do so. Parish opening information should occur through the parish website and on other social media. Each pastor or pastoral administrator, working with their pastoral council, should be sure they have the diocesan directives in place prior to opening for the public to attend Mass.

As we open up our churches for public Mass, expect that these celebrations will not be exactly what we may be used to or expect. Even though the coronavirus curve is flattening, the pandemic is not over. We must take precautions that will keep our risk as reduced as possible.

Protocols have been developed through a committee working with the Director of Worship, that have considered expert advice from the medical field and liturgical experts. The protocols are meant to complement the wise guidance of the federal, state and local health agencies for the sake of the common good. Below is a list of some things you can expect when you return to public worship.

- Expect that you will not see everyone at Mass. **In the Diocese of Gaylord, dispensation from your Sunday obligation is extended through Sunday, September 6, 2020.** Not all will feel comfortable returning to public worship right away and some people should not return right away, including those over 65 years of age and those in a higher-risk category because of health issues and those who are currently ill. However, if you wish to return to Mass your Sunday obligation may be fulfilled at any Mass during the week.
- Expect that not all parishioners will be able to attend Mass on a Sunday because of reduced capacity. Churches are not to exceed 25% capacity in order to maintain proper social distancing. It is possible that Masses may be held outside.
- Expect to see all people over the age of two wearing masks.
- Expect that Communion distribution will be different to afford safe distancing between individuals.

- Expect the music to be led only by the musician and cantor. Or, you may not have any music at all for a while.
- There will be no hymn books or missals or worship aids in the pews.
- Expect other directives that may affect your local community and expect differences between parishes. We are striving for unity in our celebrations from parish to parish, not uniformity. What works one way in one parish, might work differently in another.
- Expect that each parish may open on a different schedule. We need patience to guide us these next few months.

I ask for and beg your patience as we learn all over again what it means to gather together. This will take some getting used to. I believe it can be done – so that we will be respectful of each other and our desire to resume our public Masses with decorum and dignity.

During this time, let us pray for each other and support each other as we resume our public celebrations. May what we do in these next few weeks as we re-open, as St Peter urges, lead to “praise, glory and honor” when Jesus Christ appears in our midst. “We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.”

Invoking the prayerful embrace of our Lady of Mt Carmel, the patroness of our diocese, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Steven J Raica
Bishop of Gaylord