



DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE - SOUTH BEND

915 South Clinton Street • Post Office Box 390
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May 6, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This past Friday, Governor Holcomb issued his “Back on Track” Roadmap to Safely Reopen Indiana. This roadmap is designed to safely open Indiana’s economy, but it also includes guideline for places of worship and allows the re-convening of religious services inside churches.

This past Monday, the five Bishops of Indiana agreed that we would all begin to resume public liturgies by May 30th, the Vigil of Pentecost, with the proper restrictions for safety. We also jointly decided that we would maintain the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until at least August 15th.

After much consultation, I have decided to lift the suspension on public liturgies here in our diocese beginning on the weekend of May 23-24, the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Though we were not able to celebrate in person together the Resurrection of the Lord on Easter Sunday, we will be able to celebrate together Our Lord’s glorious Ascension. Mass attendance that weekend and following will need to be limited in order to observe the necessary social distancing within our churches. I am leaving it to our pastors to decide how to handle how many people can attend any given Mass. We have not specified a number since our churches differ in size and seating capacity. I know that some parishes will be increasing the number of Sunday Masses.

It is absolutely essential that we observe the required social distancing in our churches (and also outside the church, in the parking lot, etc.), a most effective means to prevent the spread of the virus. We are also mandating that all wear face masks within our churches. I ask everyone to observe these regulations of our diocese and our government so that we do not contribute to a rebound effect that would force us to take steps back and even force us to suspend public liturgies again.

I have informed our pastors that, in the event of stricter rules and regulations mandated by local government because of particular circumstances (e.g. a serious outbreak of the virus in a local area), those directives should be followed. Such directives may be stricter than the diocesan and state directives.

During the weekend of May 17-18, I am allowing First Holy Communion Masses to be celebrated in our parishes. These are not *per se* “public Masses” since attendance will be open only to first communicants and their families and invited guests. I felt it was important to do this for the sake of our children who have been so eagerly awaiting to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist for the first time. I have left it up to the pastors to decide if their parishes are ready and prepared for First Communions on that weekend.

I know it will be a challenge to organize the numbers of people who might attend any particular Mass. There will no doubt be some challenges, so I ask everyone to be patient. This is new territory for all of us. We want to accommodate as many people as is safely possible. There is no “perfect” plan in the situation we face and we are all doing our best in resuming public liturgies while, at the same time, taking the necessary precautions to protect people from the virus and to serve the common good. This will require everyone’s cooperation, patience, and understanding. I know I can count on you, the people of our diocese, who have been so cooperative these past two months. It has been beautiful for me to see our spiritual solidarity during this pandemic.

You may wish to check out the more specific liturgical directives and recommendations from our Diocesan Office of Worship. They can be found on www.diocesefwsb.org/covid-19.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to whom our nation, our diocese, and our parishes were re-consecrated on May 1st, intercede for us as we follow our roadmap to a safer earthly situation, and, even more importantly, as we strive to follow the roadmap to the safety and joy of heaven! And may Pope Saint John Paul II, whose 100th birthday is May 18th, intercede for us! May God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Kevin C. Rhoades*

Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend