



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

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DECREE

Until a new vaccine is developed as a means of protection, this new COVID 19 *will continue* to be a threat to the health of the diocesan family of west Tennessee. From what we have learned since March 2020, those disciples of the Lord that are in their senior years and those that are at-risk with other significant health issues are more severely affected when infected with COVID 19. We must be attentive to the changing health situation in each of the twenty-one counties of our Diocese.

By the grace of God, by our participation in the efforts to lovingly take care of our neighbor's health and by the dedicated work of physicians and nurses and health department personnel, the rapid spread of COVID 19 has slowed down in most of the twenty-one counties in west Tennessee that make up our Diocese. Though our pastors have been very supportive of my efforts, as seen in the DECREE of 1 May 2020, they long for the day when the mandated restrictions and instructions are lifted. I long for this day as well.

As we have witnessed over these four months, there is no uniformity in the guidance given by the various health departments, the state and local civil authorities, the C.D.C. and other medical resources. And, to compound the uncertainty that this lack of uniformity creates in us, the rate of new cases of infection has increased in a few counties these last few weeks, especially in Shelby County, but has decreased in most of the other counties of west Tennessee.

Granting the fluidity seen in the various professional health services' advice and counsel, along with the uneven infection rate seen in our twenty-one counties, this new DECREE for the faithful, and subsequent decrees regarding this health issue, will be issued month by month, so that I may be attentive to the changing situations seen in our twenty-one counties.

And so, as of the 1st of July 2020, please know the following:

FIRST, that *the dispensation* from the obligation to attend holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation continues in effect through the 4th of September. In particular, those who are experiencing any sickness and their caregivers, those with any health vulnerability and those fearful of the possible infection of COVID 19 should stay at home. I ask all pastors to make this known to all, especially to those parishioners and families that might be more vulnerable to the severe effects of this virus.

SECOND, please follow the required instructions and restrictions listed below:

1. The withholding of the *cup of blessing* (chalices for Holy Communion) and the withholding of any physical exchange of peace during Mass continues in effect through the 31st July.

2. Aside from the different fora of public worship (the celebration of the Word and the Sacraments), there are to be no social gatherings in the parish of more than fifty people in any one room or enclosed space, through the 31st of July.
3. The protective “physical distancing” is to be maintained through the 31st of July.
4. Because of this, and because singing is an easy vehicle of spreading droplets, choirs should not be organized to assist in our liturgical prayer, through the 31st of July.
5. Each Pastor and Administrator, being attentive to the health bulletins issued from state and local county officials, is to discern and decide the capacity that the Nave of their worship space should hold, from between 50% to 75% of capacity. This may mean that Pastors of large parishes may need to offer additional Masses or additional areas for Mass or both. This is in effect through the 31st of July.
6. All C.D.C. guidelines for personal hygiene are to be followed (hand washing and sanitizing). Facial coverings (masks) are to be worn, through the 31st of July.
7. The Pastor is to urge all of his parishioners to know that, out of love for their clergy and their neighbor, that during these difficult days when COVID 19 continues to infect our people, it is preferable to receive the Eucharist in their hands, through the 31st of July. We urge this, but gently and with sensitivity.
8. Those that administer Holy Communion should take every precaution: purifying hands thoroughly before and after offering Holy Communion; wearing a face mask during the Rite of Communion, through the 31st of July. Clergy should take care that they too are cared for and protected.

As we continue to deal with the various points of crisis in our cities and towns (health, hunger, loss of jobs, situational depression, fear and concern, the issues of race relations), please be assured that I will offer additional instructions as they are needed. I ask all Pastors to inform your parishioners of the contents of this Decree. The following guidelines are suggested to all Pastors and Administrators:

Guidelines for Parishes to Consider for Safe Reopening

1. Keep nurseries closed: Nurseries and children’s liturgies should be discontinued through the 31st of July. Consider encouraging people with small children to keep them at home to the extent practicable. This is why I ask every pastor with a capacity to “stream” parish liturgies to do so, so that all staying at home will be able to join the parish community in prayer.

2. Outdoor Mass and additional Masses: This seems like the ideal option to choose, if it is possible for the parish. Some parishes have large fields that could accommodate quite a large outdoor mass with people physically distanced (and bringing their own lawn chairs). This could be beneficial for parishes with very large numbers of parishioners. And, at larger churches, consider an overflow mass into a gym or family room, either celebrated by another priest or on video with a deacon or EMOHC to bring communion to the faithful in the overflow room at time for communion.

3. The “collection basket” is not to be passed person to person: Either have a common bowl that people drop their offering in, or have the ushers with the baskets on poles collect the offering. Also, consider for the time being to try and limit common touching of items. Perhaps temporarily remove

missals and hymnals, so multiple people won't be handling books or missals. Maybe paper song sheets with the lyrics printed on them could be used instead.

4. Cleaning: Be sure the restrooms have plenty of soap, paper towels, and there is hand sanitizer. Pews and all the high contact areas must be sanitized between masses. This would likely include door handles, pews, and rails. If cleaning products are made readily available, they could consider asking select parishioner volunteers to help with this wipe down between masses. And, recommend having a cleaning crew conduct a more thorough cleaning during the week.

5. Having ushers – greeters at every door, welcoming all with hand sanitizer, before and after holy Mass.



I am yours, in the light and love of the Risen Lord,

Most Reverend David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee

Given at the Chancery in Memphis on the 17th day of June 2020

Very Reverend James M. Clark, J.C.L., J.V.
Chancellor