



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DECREE

The fall season and the ongoing concerns regarding the novel Coronavirus

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. As we have witnessed over these six 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. 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 situation seen in our twenty-one counties.

And so, as of 1st of September 2020, please note the following:

FIRST: The *dispensation* from the obligation to attend holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation continues in effect through 4th of October. In particular, those who are experiencing any sickness, their caregivers, those with any health vulnerability and those fearful of the possible infection of COVID-19 should stay at home. I asked 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. All CDC guidelines for personal hygiene are to be followed (hand washing and sanitizing). Facial coverings (masks) are to be worn while at the parish or mission, through 4th of October.
2. During holy mass, the cleric is to wear the mask during the Procession, throughout the Liturgy of the Word and during the parish's reception of Holy Communion (see above).
3. All clergy and all that assist them in administering Holy Communion should take every precaution: purifying hands thoroughly before and after offering Holy Communion: wearing a face mask during the Right of Communion through the 4th of October.
4. 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 4th of October. We urge this, but gently and with sensitivity.
5. 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 4th of October.
6. Choirs may begin to assist our worship during holy Mass, with proper distancing and the use of masks.
7. Each Pastor and Administrator, being particularly attentive to the health bulletins issued from state city and county officials, is to discern and decide the capacity that the Nave of their worship space should hold, to a maximum of 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 4th of October.
8. Aside from the different fora of the public celebration of holy Mass, there are to be no gatherings in the parish of more than 50 people in any one classroom or enclosed space, through the 4th of October. This should not prevent PRE and Catechumenate programs from starting, and we need for these programs of ongoing formation to begin their work.
9. In our parishes in missions, social gatherings after the celebration of baptisms, weddings, funerals and *quinceañeras* should be restricted to this fifty- person limit, maintaining physical distancing. Pastors are to decide whether food is offered at these post-celebration socials.
10. The protective "physical distancing " (six feet apart) is to be maintained through the 4th of October.

THIRD: Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the Principals of the Catholic schools of the Diocese and their assistance, in collaboration with their Pastors, have worked “non-stop” to prepare for the opening of our schools. I am so grateful for their dedicated service and their leadership. Regarding sports activities at our Catholic schools, our Diocesan website has a listing of which sports activities are available to our children and teens.

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, drug and alcohol abuse, 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:

Additional Guidelines for Parishes to Consider for Safe Re-opening

1. **How is the parish to open up the nursery?** Pastors are to work with their volunteer teams to decide if a nursery should be opened, remembering physical distancing and the need for facial coverings. Each pastor should check with his local health department about their advice regarding the Nursery and the Parents Day Out. 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 (Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion) 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 so 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.** Pastors are to make sure that the restrooms have plenty of soap, paper towels, and there is hand sanitizer. Pews and all the high contact areas should be sanitized between masses. This would likely include doorhandles, 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. **Ushers-Greeters** should continue to offer sanitizer fluids to our people before every holy Mass.

This decree is given on 26 August 2020.

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

+ *David P. Talle*

Most Reverend David P. Talle

Fr. James Clark

Very Reverend James Clark, J.V., Chancellor

