



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

5825 SHELBY OAKS DRIVE  
MEMPHIS, TN 38134 901-373-1200

**DECREE**

***The cold and flu season, the gift of Sunday Mass and the ongoing concerns regarding the novel Coronavirus***

Though a vaccine might be on its way before the end of 2020, this new COVID 19 *will continue* to be a threat to the health of the diocesan family of west Tennessee. In October, there have been spikes in several of the counties of our Diocese, including Shelby and Madison. This is why ***all of us should wear our masks when in public (around anyone) and keep our physical distance between one another and wash and sanitize our hands frequently!***

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, I will issue this kind of DECREE for the faithful every few months, so that I may be attentive to the changing situations seen in our twenty-one counties.

If the **COVID 19 vaccine is offered and widely distributed sooner than expected...OR...if the spike in positive cases increases**, this DECREE might be amended before the scheduled date.

And so, as of the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2020, please know the following:

**FIRST**, as most all of you know by now, *the dispensation* from the obligation to attend holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation **ended on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October**. "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate at Mass (canon 1247 of the Church's Canon Law). This "obligation" is both a joy and a discipline for us Catholics, to gather together as members of the Body of Christ, proclaiming the Presence of the Lord and accepting our commission, as proclaimers of His Victory over sin and death. I ask all Catholics to renew the spiritual obligation, to join in fellowship at your parish for holy Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. **While keeping safe, we need to come back to the Sunday celebration of holy Mass.** We need to come back to the strength of each community of faith. We need to support the faith of one another during these difficult days.

HAVING SAID THAT, please note, that "If participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes impossible because of the absence of a sacred minister or another grave cause, it is strongly recommended that the faithful...devote themselves to prayer for suitable time alone, as a family... (canon 1248)".

What is a grave cause that would make it impossible to meet this "Sunday obligation"? Granting the continued presence of this highly infectious new coronavirus among our people, *any health precondition that makes the person or parent or health provider more vulnerable to COVID 19...this kind of issue is the kind of grave cause mentioned in the canon above.* Some of the health preconditions would be: diabetes; any issue with breathing and the lungs; any medical issue with the heart; a vulnerable immune system; morbid obesity; current medical treatment of an illness; if you are feeling ill; a crippling fear of the virus, and so on.

I continue to ask all Catholics and their family and friends attending holy Mass to join your Pastor in the fellowship of the Catholic parish for Sunday Mass.

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

1. All C.D.C. 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 the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.
2. During holy Mass, the cleric is to wear the mask during the Procession, throughout the Liturgy of the Word (while not having a speaking part in the Liturgy of the Word) and during the parish's reception of Holy Communion (see above) and in the Recessional and in greeting the congregation after holy Mass..
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 Rite of Communion, through the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.
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 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021. We urge this, but gently and with sensitivity. The communicant should take off his or her mask just before approaching the cleric or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, putting it back on after reception of Holy Communion.
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 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.
6. Choirs may 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, up to a 75% of capacity (with distancing). 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 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.
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 fifty people in any one classroom or enclosed space other than the Nave, through the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021. 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 and 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; but this practice of food-fellowship is not encouraged by health authorities.
10. The protective "physical distancing" (six feet apart) is to be maintained through the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2021.

**THIRD:** Since the beginning of the "COVID 19" crisis, the Principals and their assistants of the Catholic schools in the Diocese, 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. School web-sites have this information available as well.

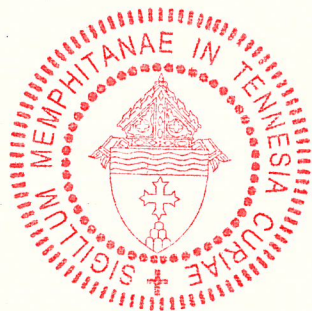
As we continue to deal with the various points of crisis in our cities and towns (health, hunger, loss of jobs, situational depression, fear and concern, drug and alcohol abuse, the issues of race relations), please be assured that I will offer additional instructions as they are needed. I ask all Pastors 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 Reopening

- 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 the ability, to continue to stream parish liturgies 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.** 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 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. Ushers-greeters** should continue to offer sanitizer fluids to our people before every holy Mass.

This Decree is given on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2020. I am yours, in the light and love of the Risen Lord,



+ David P. Talley

Most Reverend David P. Talley

James Clark

Very Reverend James Clark, J.V., Chancellor