



DIOCESE OF DULUTH

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Announcement of a New Executive Order

May 23, 2020

Saturday of the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Dear Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Duluth,

I wish to let you know of an important breakthrough in our state that will allow for greater worship opportunities for all people of faith. This breakthrough is consistent with our need, as Catholics, to both protect public health and to gather together to pray. Concern for the common good and concern for the faith lives of believers are concerns that we share.

In a few days, Governor Walz will issue a new executive order that allows faith communities to publicly worship inside using 25% of their church up to 250 people. Public worship outside the church is allowed up to 250 people, as well. This order will take effect beginning Wednesday, May 27.

Governor Walz and his administration hope that when faith communities gather, they will do so consistent with public health guidance. We will endeavor to do this by being mindful of the state's recommendations as we dovetail them with our own Diocese of Duluth COVID-19 Protocols.

The Catholic bishops of Minnesota believe that the prior rules limiting faith-based gatherings to ten people unreasonably burdened the liberty of the Church to bring Mass and the sacraments to the faithful. Because we believe that the Eucharist is the bread of everlasting life and the source and summit of our faith, we were prepared to move ahead and allow larger Masses without support from public officials. The life of faith was receiving unequal treatment, as allowances were made for other, less essential activities. The new executive order removes that unreasonable burden on the Church and allows us to celebrate and receive the Eucharist.

I would like to express my gratitude to Governor Walz, Lieutenant Governor Flanagan, and the other members of the governor's administration. I am thankful we could come to a consensus about a reasonable and safe path forward that allows greater numbers of people of faith to safely return to public worship.

The bishops of Minnesota are also grateful for the help of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty which provided sound legal counsel in defense of the liberty of the Church to offer the sacraments, especially in our conversations with the Walz Administration. Thank you also to the law firm Sidley Austin for its work on this matter.

Although we had previously announced that a broader participation in public Mass could begin May 26, we need to move that back one day to May 27. This is to allow the executive order raising the allowed capacity for gatherings to go into effect. We will also make small adjustments to our protocols consistent with the guidance that will be issued by the Minnesota Department of Health. We can be thankful that the removal of the limitations will allow us to have Mass in the Easter season and come together on Sunday, May 31 for the celebration of Pentecost.

Going forward, as a reminder, the bishops of Minnesota have told our pastors and faithful that they should only return to public Mass when they are able to follow the protocols. Parishes should only open when they are able to implement the protocols. Again, if the faithful feel safer at home, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains lifted. We also strongly encourage those over the age of 65 or who are especially vulnerable not to attend for now.

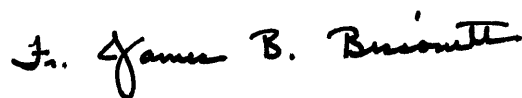
Let me express my gratitude to our priests, their parish staffs and our Diocesan Pastoral Center staff. Our priests have been on the front lines of the pandemic — ministering to the sick in their homes, hospitals, and care facilities.

Finally, let me express my thanks to you, the faithful of the Diocese of Duluth. While unable to receive the Eucharist — the real presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus — for the past two months, you have creatively and patiently found ways to attend Mass online and to learn about and live your faith. You have made spiritual communions, supported your sisters and brothers in need, supported your parish, and stepped-up to help others. I encourage you to continue these efforts on behalf of those who must remain at home while desiring to be with us in church. Their prayers are special graces for us.

Please remember to pray for all those who have lost their lives in this pandemic, for those who grieve them, and for those who are sick and care for them. Also pray for the women and men in the health care field who daily risk their health to take care of our sisters and brothers who are sick. May our prayers also bring a swift end to this pandemic.

May God bless you and your families as we look forward to a return to broader worship until that day when all our people can return to Mass in our churches.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. James B. Bissonette". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Very Reverend James B. Bissonette
Diocesan Administrator