

DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

May 26, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I begin writing this letter on the Feast of Mary Mother of the Church, I pray that Mary may intercede on behalf of all of us that we might more fully open our hearts and minds to the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit given to us anew, on the Feast of Pentecost. Once again during this time of COVID we are reminded of the infinite love of our God.

Before I go any further, I want to stress that none of the details included in this letter have any bearing on our Diocese of Superior Catholic Schools. For the remainder of this school year, our schools will continue to follow the guidelines for schools as set by the CDC and WI Department of Health.

I expect that everyone is aware that the CDC recently announced changes with regards to the “WEARING OF MASKS” and “SOCIAL DISTANCING” in public for those who are fully vaccinated. With the good news of the drop in active cases in the Diocese and the changes in recommendations from the CDC, I am happy to report that we are once again going to be able to modify some of the current policies regarding our liturgical celebrations and other parish activities.

After much prayer and consultation, **IT IS WITH GREAT JOY THAT I AM ANNOUNCING THAT I AM ONCE AGAIN REVOKING THE DISPENSATION WHICH EXCUSED ALL OF THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR FROM THE OBLIGATION TO ATTEND MASS ON SUNDAY AND HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION.** The date I am choosing to do this is June 6, the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Although it may not be possible or prudent for some to attend the public celebration of the Mass, thanks be to God, there no longer seems to be a reason that rises to the seriousness of a general dispensation for all the faithful. With the absolute importance of the Eucharist in our lives, I believe The Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, or Corpus Christi, is an appropriate date to welcome back all faith filled Catholics who are able to come to Mass. When I lifted the obligation last fall before the second wave spike of COVID-19 prompted me to reinstate it, I stated in my letter of September 14, 2020:

Our Catholic Faith teaches us that the obligation to attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation is paramount to who we are. I pray as you read the word “obligation” that it is not being read as a heavy burden of some kind being imposed on you, but rather as your true love response to the total, pure love our God has for each one of us. The Second Vatican Council so clearly teaches us that full and active participation in the Mass is the primary and indispensable source and summit of the Christian life. Most recently, Pope Francis in his homily on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (June 14, 2020) stated, “We cannot do without the Eucharist because it is God’s memorial. And it heals our wounded memory.” Who among us is not in the need of God’s healing of body, mind, and spirit in our lives?

As I lift the dispensation, I want to thank the many priests of the Diocese who have been providing a virtual celebration of the Mass via Facebook or some other means. I encourage them to continue with this ministry as again, I know there are individuals who should not, and are not able to physically attend Mass. What a blessing it is for those people to be able to receive the blessing of a Spiritual Communion.

Some of the health issues and circumstance which would allow a personal dispensation to NOT attend Holy Mass without incurring serious sin would be:

1. If you are sick,
2. test positive for COVID-19, or come in contact with someone who has tested positive in the past 14 days,
3. are running a fever,
4. have a cough or who has COVID/flu like symptoms.
5. who is in the 'at risk' category due to:
 - a. age 60 or older,
 - b. compromised immune system,
 - c. diabetes,
 - d. serious heart conditions,
 - e. or if you believe attending Mass would pose an undue risk to other family members such as elderly parents you are caring for is dispensed.

For those of you who have been attending Mass and for those who are able to begin to return, I want to let you know that with the lifting of the dispensation, I am also authorizing some modifications to our celebration of Mass and some other parish functions.

I certainly understand that not all parishes/clusters are in the same place for being able to make some of these changes. Therefore, I am directing parish leadership not to make changes before they are prepared to do so safely and responsibly. We certainly do not want to throw all caution to the wind and risk a resurgence of COVID. I am guessing that for some, the modifications will NOT be enough and for others it will be TOO much too fast. I beg your continued patience, understanding, and Charity, with me and with one another as we move forward. In advance, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE, UNDERSTANDING, AND CHARITY AS WE MOVE FORWARD.

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY OR AS THE PARISH/CLUSTER IS PREPARED TO:

1. Out of CHARITY and in care for ourselves and one another, we will continue to ENCOURAGE the wearing of facemasks and SOCIAL DISTANCING, but they will not be expressly required except for some specific situations. We prayerfully ask for charity, understanding and patience as the restrictions are loosened. EVERYONE IS IN A DIFFERENT PLACE WITH REGARDS TO THE NEED OF MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING AND WE NEED TO PROCLAIM AND LIVE THE MESSAGE THAT "ALL ARE WELCOME," MASKED OR UNMASKED!
2. We will continue to strongly encourage people to get vaccinated for COVID-19, but vaccination is not required.
3. The ropes, chains, tape, or whatever you used to block off every other pew are to be taken down. I am not aware of any indoor occupancy restrictions anywhere in the Diocese of Superior at this time. However, I encourage parish leaders to contact the local municipal or county Department of Health Services to see if your area has an indoor limit. Although the barriers have been removed, we want to continue to encourage and certainly allow people the option to social distance.
4. Holy Water Fonts are to REMAIN EMPTY.
5. Entrance and recessional processions are permitted with the cross, candles, and other ministers. All those processing, must wear masks.
6. Priests, Deacons, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, ushers, greeters, etc., MUST WEAR MASKS while exercising their liturgical roles at Masses and Liturgy of the Word with Communion

Services. As in the past, while in the act of reading the scriptures, giving the homily or reading the prayers from the Roman Missal, the priest, deacon, and reader do not need to wear masks. This is especially true when the priest is praying the Prayer of Consecration. Social distancing still needs to be observed in the sanctuary area. I have heard time and again how hypocritical it is for the priest or deacon telling everyone else that they need to wear a mask when they themselves are not. Any time a priest or deacon is not wearing a mask, they are to be a minimum of 12 feet from anyone else.


7. Both youth and adult altar servers may now be used. However, social distancing needs to be observed and they **MUST ALSO WEAR MASKS**. In the case of minors, a parent or guardian's permission is required.
8. Ushers may begin taking up the offertory collection using long handled collection baskets. Baskets are **NOT** to be passed down the pew from person to person. Ushers must be wearing masks and should wear gloves.
9. At this time, we **WILL NOT** be reinstating the Sign of Peace.
10. We will continue to offer Holy Communion under the species of the Body of Christ **ONLY**. I also continue to encourage people to receive in the hand and not on the tongue.
11. When singing, **ALL PEOPLE ARE TO WEAR MASKS** to help limit the airborne mist we produce.
12. Dinners and lunches are still discouraged. However, if a parish wants to start serving food they may do so if they can follow the directives which have been given. If your parish does **NOT** feel they can do this at this time, please understand that it is your safety and wellbeing that they have in mind.

I cannot begin to adequately thank each one of you for your patience and understanding as these difficult times continue. As I already stated, I know, that for some, I have not gone far enough in our return to the pre-COVID days, and for others I have gone too far. Be assured I am trying to make the best decisions I can based on the information I have and much prayer. As the COVID-19 situation hopefully continues to improve, I will keep you updated on further modifications to our practices.

Be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones. As we move into Ordinary Time, may the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us at Pentecost guide us and protect us. As we move forward, let us put into practice in our daily lives, the love we have celebrated this past Easter Season. May you and your loved ones be healthy and safe and may you know the loving presence of God with you every moment of every day.

MAY THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI, THE BODY AND BLOOD OF OUR LORD, BE A CELEBRATION FILLED WITH JOY, HOPE, PEACE, AND LOVE.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,


Most Rev. James P. Powers
Bishop of the Diocese of Superior