DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Pastoral Letter
To All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious Men and Women,
and Faithful Laity of the Diocese of Fort Worth

May 20, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. This solemnity can rightly be considered the birthday of the Church. Pentecost redeems the sin of Babel. The events of Pentecost relayed in the Acts of the Apostles reveal God's continued undoing of the effects of sin in the victory won by Christ over our accuser, the devil. Whereas human beings at Babel sought to speak and to live according to their own word rather than receive, be blessed by, and proclaim the word that God had already spoken to them. Babel results in acrimony and anguish, mistrust and misery among human beings. In contrast, the Apostles at Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and His seven specific gifts, the power of Grace, the theological and infused moral virtues, and the consolation of such fruits as joy and peace.

This Pentecost Sunday marks for us yet another transition from the shared burdens and oppression of the pandemic towards the responsibilities we share as members of the Church of authentic freedom for loving service to our neighbor and reverent worship of God. After consultation with my priests, civic officials, members of the laity, and professionals in the fields of medicine and public health I judge it prudent to make the following changes to our established protocols that have been in effect since September 25, 2020 and modified on April 26, 2021. It is our Christian responsibility to maintain our concern for others, especially those most vulnerable, so that we attend Mass safely, offer sound religious education, and contribute to the common good of our parishes and the larger community of our towns, counties, and state.

The alteration of protocols included with this letter address the celebration of Mass and other liturgies and other social and ministerial gatherings in our parishes and institutions. They update the protocols for Mass promulgated by the Office of the Vicar General in the memo of April 26, 2021 and the protocols for Gatherings Outside of Mass as promulgated by the Office of the Vicar General in the memo of December 21, 2021. These new protocols will be in effect from May 21, 2021 until further notice.

I would like to encourage people to be vaccinated if they have not already done so. I ask that all continue to be mindful and respectful of their own health and that of others. If one feels sick or is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or any other contagious virus, one should feel obliged

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officeofthebishop@fwdioc.org

to stay home from Mass. If one has responsibility for the care of a vulnerable person and legitimately has concerns of infecting that person with a virus, one should feel obliged to stay home from Mass. If one does not feel safe in attending Mass for ongoing fear of contracting the virus, one should stay home. The obligation to attend Mass remains in effect by virtue of Divine Law and the Precepts of the Church and, excepting legitimate reasons like the reasons listed above, binds every Catholic under penalty of grave sin.

While we know that viewing the celebration of Mass by means of live-streaming or television does not substitute for actual presence and participation at Mass, we also have learned that providing for live streaming of Mass is a very consoling service for those who are unable to be physically present for Mass with the community of their home parish. This is especially true for funeral Masses where many loved ones are unable to be present because of the difficulty of travel from faraway places. I would like to ask that parishes consider maintaining this practice of live streaming for the sake of including shut-ins and those who are unable to be physically present.

It is a time for us to pray for gratitude for what we have learned during this past year as the Church and as particular parishes that compose our local church of the Diocese of Fort Worth. We have learned how central the celebration of the Eucharist is to our lives and how we suffer if we are unable to attend. We have been reminded that we are human beings composed of body and soul as an integrated whole. We have learned that our primary responsibilities of discipleship begin with prayer and service to the ill, the mournful, the elderly, and the vulnerable. With every good wish and prayers for each of you, I remain,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ Michael F. Olson

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA
Bishop of Fort Worth

E. James Hart

Reverend Monsignor E. James Hart
Chancellor

DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Guidelines for the Celebration of Mass and Other Liturgical Celebrations

As we recommend liturgical gatherings, all must be mindful of and follow the established guidelines as follows:

- Safe Environment Guidelines
- Youth Ministry Guidelines
- Health Safety Guidelines – as follows

1. Masks are optional for those attending Mass.
2. Social distancing of church's worship space should be arranged to maintain 3 feet between persons and/or families -side to side and front to back. If persons of the same household are seated closer together, total occupancy is not to exceed the church capacity.
3. Holy Water fonts at church entrances may be filled and used at the judgment of parishioners. The fonts should be drained at least weekly and replaced with fresh Holy Water.
4. Hymnals and other liturgical books may be used.
5. Choirs are permitted as long as social distancing of 3 feet is maintained among members.
6. Collection plates may be passed among the pews. It is recommended to use collection baskets that are extended on a pole.
7. Pews and hard surfaces should be sanitized at the start and at the end of every Sunday or other day in which the church sanctuary is in use.
8. In accord with the rubrics of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the invitation to the liturgical assembly to share a sign of peace is left to the discretionary judgment of the priest-celebrant.
9. Holy Communion may be distributed either in the hand or on the tongue. Ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must sanitize their hands appropriately.
10. In an abundance of safety, ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required to sanitize hands and to wear masks while distributing Holy Communion.
11. Holy Communion will only be distributed as consecrated hosts. There is to be no distribution of consecrated wine from chalices.

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Guidelines for Parish Gatherings Outside of Mass

As we recommend parish gatherings, all must be mindful of and follow the established guidelines as follows:

- Safe Environment Guidelines
- Youth Ministry Guidelines
- Health Safety Guidelines – as follows

Health Safety Guidelines for Parish Gatherings Outside of Mass

General Guidelines

1. Room Capacity: please use the following formula for maintaining social distancing
    a. Room should be arranged to maintain 3 feet between persons and/or families -side to side and front to back
    b. If persons of the same household are seated closer together, total occupancy is not to exceed the room capacity
    c. Water fountains should remain covered

2. Meeting Guidelines
    a. Room should be sanitized prior to the first event of the day and following the last event of the day
    b. All participants should:
        i. Sanitize hands by washing with soap and water (preferred) and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizers
        ii. Masks are optional
        iii. Maintain social distancing during all activities

Specific Event Guidelines

3. Retreats for Adults
    a. Please submit the overnight retreat requests to the Very Reverend Jonathan Wallis, V.G., except those retreats scheduled and administered by Montserrat Retreat House
    b. Day Retreats for adults and Sacramental preparation retreats held at parishes under the meeting guidelines are authorized

4. Overnight Youth Activities
    a. Parish Led Retreats
        i. Please submit the overnight retreat request form to Jason Spoolstra: https://fwdioc.org/diocesan-forms

b. Youth Conferences/Workcamps/Summer Camps
    i. Please submit the overnight retreat requests to Nancy Eder, RN.
    ii. No International Travel is allowed

5. Child Care Programs
    a. General
        i. All programs allowed
        ii. Please submit program protocols to Nancy Eder, RN.
    b. Programs
        i. Pre-School Programs
        ii. Mother's Day Out Programs
        iii. Parish Nurseries

6. Parish Festivals
    a. For festivals: Please have a drive-through option:
        i. Food delivered to people in cars
        ii. Walk-up delivery is allowed
        iii. Frequent hand-washing and hand sanitizing
        iv. All wear masks for those handling food
        v. Maintain social distancing
    b. Outdoor gatherings allowed
        i. Maintain social distancing
    c. Please submit plans to Nancy Eder, RN.

7. Religious Education
    a. General
        i. In-person encouraged
    b. Education Programs
        i. Religious Education for K-12
        ii. Adult Religious Education
        iii. Family Catechesis

8. Sacramental Preparation
    a. All Sacramental Preparation
        i. In-person encouraged

9. Youth Groups and Discipleship Groups
    a. In-person encouraged

10. Parish Offices
    a. Offices may return to 100% in-person labor
    b. Masks are optional in parish offices

11. Catholic Schools
    a. Beginning June 1, 2021, face masks will be optional for students, staff and faculty at the Diocese of Fort Worth Catholic Schools for school events and functions.