



**DIOCESE OF FRESNO**  
**PASTORAL CENTER**  
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2021

My Dear Ones in Christ,

Over the past year or so I feel as if I have been anything but the bearer of good news. I must say, however, that even though we are about six months away from the celebration of Christmas, it is my joy to bring you 'Glad Tidings' this day. Effective on Saturday, June the 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, our Pastors and Administrators may open our Churches for the celebration of Mass and for all Sacramental services at 100% of the normal capacity of our worship spaces without social distancing. We are not alone in this. Most if not all the bishops of California will be following suit that same weekend. It is a long time coming and although we still have a way to go, I am proud of the way you have all navigated the troubled waters we have been through.

There are other welcome changes that will also go into effect at the same time although they will be accompanied by a few adjustments. Those changes include the following:

- The sign of peace at Mass may resume although we ask that physical touching be limited to one's own household. You are encouraged to offer the sign of peace to others by way of a simple bow or wave of the hand.
- Also, and this is a change very close to my heart, congregational singing may begin again. Musicians and choir members are asked to observe sensible health precautions and Pastors are encouraged to exercise their own good judgement for all of this, including whether or not the use of masks is advisable in their particular circumstances.
- Liturgical processions may begin again during the Liturgy and the collection may be taken up at the normal time although it is recommended that baskets not be handed on from person to person.
- Holy Water may be made available to the faithful at all the fonts around the Church.
- Distribution of the Eucharist by way of the chalice is still suspended for the faithful.
- Anyone distributing communion should be masked and the preferred manner of receiving is still in the hand. In any case, please keep hand sanitizer nearby.
- Ministry to the homebound may resume using the 2021 attached revised guidelines and training.

As I said in the introduction to this announcement, we still have a way to go in terms of dealing with the pandemic and getting closer to a more normal way of gathering and celebrating. Please observe the following basic precautions as these changes are implemented:

- Practice frequent hand washing and the use of hand sanitizer.
- Avoid shaking hands or other physical contact with anyone other than members of your own household.

- The wearing of face masks is still very much encouraged indoors.
- It is recommended that pews be cleansed/sanitized at least twice on Sundays. That would also apply in the case of multiple services on any given weekday.

Apart from the Mass and other Sacramental moments, other ministerial, catechetical and social gatherings may resume but only if the simple health precautions outlined above are observed carefully. Special precautions, of course, should be taken by Pastors and Administrators for events at which food is distributed. For special events, contact Risk Management for guidance and approval; the 'R-3: Trip and Function Form' is still required to be submitted for approval. Like 'Parental Discretion' at the movies, 'Pastoral Discretion' is advised!

Finally, and most importantly, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is hereby rescinded and that will be effective from Sunday, June the 20, 2021. From that day forward, all the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Fresno will be obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. Pastors and Priests especially, please be very attentive and pastoral toward those who cannot fulfill that obligation or who are not obligated to attend. As we know, pandemic or not, the obligation does not apply for those who are too sick to attend, those who are caring for someone who has a serious health problem or for those who might have some other serious reason for being absent. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2180 and #2181) can be very helpful with your pastoral approach in this regard. Also, we have learned a few things during this past year and the livestreaming of our Masses will surely benefit those who cannot attend in person for the reasons just stated.

Let me end this good news with a simple quote from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council:

"The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration." N.48

Yes, it will be so good for us to gather again for the Sunday obligation, to celebrate the mysteries of our faith on Holy Days of obligation, Holy days of wonder and Holy days of opportunity to grow in our faith and in our love of the Eucharist.

God bless you and those you love, always and in every way.

In Christ,



Bishop Joseph V. Brennan