



Church Re-Openings Phase I and II Diocese of Joliet

May 13, 2020

My Friends in the Risen Savior,

This communication comes to you as we continue to celebrate the 50 days of Easter. These days are marked by unprecedented suffering as brothers and sisters across the globe have fallen victim to a perilous contagion. In addition to the threats to our physical well-being, we are suffering spiritually as the COVID-19 pandemic has required restrictions of our worship and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

There have been moments in history, surely, when governments and rulers have persecuted Christians and barred their public worship. This is not one of them. Rather, the present restrictions come in response to an extreme medical emergency as local, state and federal health authorities – specifically public health officials – legitimately fulfill their responsibilities to safety and human life and the common good. They have based their reasonable guidance on careful consideration of empirical data and the best available disease-mitigation practices as they seek to contain the pandemic’s rage through our communities.

While everyone must exercise good citizenship in observing these restrictions, I call on the Catholic faithful, both as good citizens and as advocates for justice and charity, to comply with these regulations. From the earliest times of Sacred Scripture, we learn that our “brother’s keeper,” is a truth that must inspire us as we are called to sacrifice in line with the virtue of patience. We should also be motivated by life and human dignity. This is, at its least, a time to proclaim the breadth and depth of what it means to be pro-life, especially as this virus preys on the most vulnerable in our midst.

The good news is that a plan for gradual reopening of our churches has now taken shape, as I note below. However, since our movements will be restricted as this plan unfolds in different places, your priests and I will continue for the present time to offer Mass privately each day and live-stream and broadcast Masses from our parishes and the diocese. Joined by the priest residents of the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus, I offer Mass live-streamed six days a week at 9:00AM at the Cathedral and 10:00AM on Sunday at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/DioceseofJolietLL>. All of those who have engaged with us in enabling technology to bring the Mass and other services to our homes are to be genuinely thanked. On short notice, they have accomplished a remarkable service on our behalf.

These celebrations surely are not the same as gathering in our churches for Mass, but I know from hearing from many parishioners that they provide a great deal of solace and support in this time of uncertainty.

We must be honest about the coronavirus. We expect this situation to continue for some weeks, and any plan for reopening our Churches for public worship must include every precaution to ensure public safety.

With those realities in mind, I am heartened to announce that we have reached an agreement with the Office of the Governor on a multi-phase Plan for re-opening our churches for the celebration of the sacraments, private prayer, adoration and Mass. As I share the Plan with you, both by way of an Executive Summary and the full Plan in the following pages, I want to assure you of my prayers for you and your family's personal, material and spiritual wellbeing. I also express my appreciation to the many people on the diocesan staff and in the Office of the Governor for the many hours they have given to designing and fine tuning this agreement. Again, I call on all Catholics to seize this moment to exercise faith-filled citizenship in a way that reflects our deep regard for life, our calling as disciples of Jesus and our love of country.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Joliet