Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud

214 3RD AVENUE SOUTH - BOX 1248
ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA 56302
TELEPHONE (320) 251-2340
FAX (320) 258-7618

June 3, 2021

Dear Pastor:

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to subside, the bishops of Minnesota have made the decision together to reinstate the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation in all of our dioceses beginning the weekend of July 3-4.

Please see the accompanying document from the Minnesota Catholic Conference, which explains the importance of attending Mass in person and outlines the circumstances under which Mass attendance will still not be required for the time being. I encourage you to share the document with your parishioners. It will be posted on our diocesan website in the section dedicated to coronavirus updates: www.stcdio.org/coronavirus-update.

I ask that you use these next few weeks as a time of invitation and outreach to those who have been away from parish life — some perhaps for as long as a year. It is with great joy that we welcome them back to the celebration of the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. At the same time, please be sensitive to those who are still not able to return to Mass and ensure that their pastoral needs continue to be met.

Finally, thank you for everything you have done to create safe spaces for worship during this pandemic. May God continue to bless your ministry in the year ahead.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Donald J. Kettler

+Donald J. Kettler
Bishop of Saint Cloud

MINNESOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Returning to Mass: July 1 Marks End of Dispensation in Minnesota

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a painful time of separation that necessitated, for a short while, suspension of public Masses and the dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. Nonetheless, since May 2020, Minnesota's bishops have made available the public celebration of Mass to those who wished to attend. Parishes have done an amazing job creating safe spaces for worship and the sacraments during the past year.

Now, as the pandemic subsides, and public gathering restrictions and safety protocols are lifted, it is time to gather as the Body of Christ once again. Therefore, the bishops and diocesan administrators of the Minnesota Catholic Conference have decided to reinstate the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation beginning the weekend of July 3-4, 2021.

Why is attending Mass in-person so important?

St. John Chrysostom reminds us, "You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests" (CCC 2179).

Attending the in-person celebration of Sunday Mass and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist are vital to our lives as Catholic Christians. We were created for Communion. Whether you are returning to your home parish, or seeking a local parish on vacation, your participation in the Mass unites you with the Church — the Body of Christ. This communion transforms us as persons and enables us to make manifest the Kingdom of God in our world. The celebration of the Eucharist truly is the source and summit of our faith.

Pope Francis, in his homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi in 2018, said, "Jesus prepares a place for us here below, because the Eucharist is the beating heart of the Church. It gives her birth and rebirth; it gathers her together and gives her strength. But the Eucharist also prepares for us a place on high, in eternity, for it is the Bread of heaven."

Does this mean there will no longer be any dispensation from the Sunday and Holy Day obligations?

Although the general dispensation will no longer be available, the Church has always recognized that certain circumstances can excuse a person from the requirement to observe the obligation. Persons are excused from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays or Holy Days under the following circumstances:

1. You have reason to believe your health would be significantly compromised if you were to contract a communicable illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category).
2. You exhibit flu-like symptoms.
3. You have good reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (e.g., you were in recent contact with someone who tested positive for a contagious illness such as COVID or influenza).
4. You care for the sick, homebound, or infirmed.
5. You are pregnant or you are 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation for high-risk individuals).
6. You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (e.g., no Mass is offered; you are infirm; or, while wanting to go, you are prevented for some reason you cannot control, such as your ride did not show up).
7. You have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.

If situations 1 through 3 apply to you, prudent concern for your neighbor should lead you to stay home. If you fall within situations 4-7, please exercise good judgment, consider the common good, and know you would not be held to the obligation of attending Mass. For further questions about the application of any of these situations, please contact your pastor. These categories will be reviewed in due course and revised as needed.

Those within the categories enumerated above must still observe the Lord's Day and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, meditating on the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection; an excellent way to do this is by praying the Liturgy of the Hours and participating in a broadcast/livestream of the Sunday Mass.

More information, links to parish websites, and a portal to each diocese's protocols can be found at the website www.backtomassmn.org.

The return of our faith family to Mass is a joyous occasion. With that in mind, we also encourage the faithful to post on social media about their return-to-Mass worship experiences using the hashtag #backtomassmn. Wherever you may be, welcome home!

Most Rev. Bernard A. Hebda, Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Most Rev. Andrew H. Cozzens, Auxiliary Bishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Most Rev. John M. Quinn, Bishop of Winona-Rochester
Most Rev. Donald J. Kettler, Bishop of St. Cloud
Most Rev. Daniel J. Felton, Bishop of Duluth
Most Rev. Richard E. Pates, Apostolic Administrator of Crookston
Very Rev. Douglas L. Grams, Diocesan Administrator of New Ulm