



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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May 15, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During the past weeks, we bishops of Minnesota have proactively engaged public officials about the importance of some limited opening of our churches for Mass. A plan to resume public Masses May 18 in a limited manner — and only in places where parishes were willing and ready to follow a prescribed set of sanitation protocols — was submitted May 8 to the Governor for feedback. Four Lutheran denominations joined our letter to Governor Walz. A number of other denominations and independent churches submitted plans May 8, as well.

To our disappointment, the Governor and his administration declined to engage in dialogue with us on our proposal. While easing the stay-at-home order on May 13, the Governor's executive order *explicitly prohibited* faith-based gatherings with more than ten unrelated people. Governor Walz has called a meeting of faith leaders for Monday, May 18, to solicit feedback on a new set of public worship guidelines that his administration will be producing for churches and other houses of worship. The date of re-opening for religious gatherings of more than ten people, however, is still uncertain.

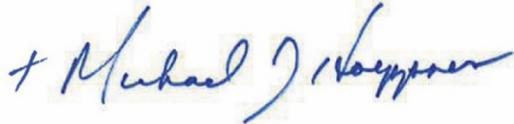
It is important for you, the Catholic faithful, to know that the Catholic bishops of Minnesota are united in their conviction that the decision of when to resume public Masses is ultimately ours, and not subject to the directives from the Governor or other public officials. Just as we dispensed with the Sunday obligation and suspended public Masses voluntarily before any executive orders were issued, the decision to gather again belongs to us alone.

Our decision will be guided by three principles: 1) the duty of worship we owe God and the rights of the faithful to the sacraments. 2) love of neighbor and concern for the common good, including the health and well-being of our neighbors; and 3) respect for public authorities and their directives and guidance. You can expect that we will weigh these considerations carefully as part of our common responsibility to the state, and that we will zealously protect our liberties to assemble and worship freely.

Early next week, we bishops of Minnesota will together decide on a path forward which will include identifying a specific date on which to return to limited public Masses of greater than ten people. In the meantime, we must continue to operate as we have been for the past weeks. This means creatively working within the ten-person limit to offer as many people as possible the opportunity to come to Mass and offering the Mass online. It means preparing for the day when our churches will be open for public worship according to established protocols. I am sending with this communication a detailed description of these protocols. When a date is set for reopening our churches for limited public worship, I hope that all our parishes will be ready to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to the faithful. It is important that parishes return to a limited public celebration of the Mass only when they are ready, are comfortable with, and able to implement carefully these protocols.

We know that many of you share our frustration and sadness about the Governor's decision to prohibit religious gatherings of more than 10 people. We ask that you continue to pray for an end to the pandemic and for our civic leaders, and that you presume the good will of those charged with these important and difficult decisions. Let us ask the Lord to help us cultivate patience, serenity, and peace of soul during our continued Eucharistic fast — believing that God will bring many graces from our sacrifices.

Sincerely, in the name of the Lord Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael J. Hoepfner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Michael J. Hoepfner
Bishop of Crookston