

DIOCESE OF PALM BEACH

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Office of
THE BISHOP

May 11, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Lord:

For us, as men and women of faith in the Diocese of Palm Beach, these days of the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus have been very challenging and even painful in regard to our inability to have public access to our parishes and churches. As we slowly move to a position of cautious "reopening" in this regard, I believe the words of Pope Francis are paramount: "At this time, when indications have been given to start coming out of quarantine, we pray that the Lord will grant to His people, to all of us, the grace of prudence and obedience to these indications, so that the pandemic will not return." Since, as of May 11, all of the counties of our Diocese are now in phase one of both the national and state guidelines for the lessening of public restrictions, I am very pleased to be able to state that we will begin a process of "reopening" of our churches in a spirit of prayer, prudence and patience. It is imperative for us to realize that while progress has been made, the pandemic is not over by any means and we are obligated to continue cooperating with each other to do what we can to ensure the safety of ourselves and others and to prevent its return.

In this context, I emphasize that all Catholics of the Diocese of Palm Beach are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and that this dispensation remains in effect until further notification. This is meant to ensure the well-being and safety of all, not only the elderly and those who are at risk for illness, but anyone of any age who is making a prudent decision about their own well-being as well as that of others. Simply stated, as we begin and continue the process of "reopening," no one is obliged or should feel obligated to come to church. This is an individual and free decision and one may have an overriding serious obligation not to come.

The following is the three-phased "reopening" that we will shortly begin with the protocols that will be followed in this process:

1. As of Monday, May 18, the churches in the Diocese of Palm Beach will be open for private prayer and visits by the faithful. Chapels, because of their limited capacity, will remain closed. Each parish will determine what hours during the day the church will be open. Personal appointments for the Sacrament of Reconciliation will still be available, but each parish may also set up an appointed time for the hearing of confessions within the church. Special rooms will be set up for this and, as in all visits to the church, social distancing, both in the celebration of the sacrament and while waiting, will need to be observed. It is highly recommended that facemasks be worn for private visits and for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

2. As of Monday, May 25, the normal weekday Mass schedule will resume in each parish for attendance by the faithful. The parish church, not its chapel, will be the place for these celebrations. The protocols that will be utilized for Sunday Mass will also be observed for the celebration of daily Mass. These protocols are listed below under number 3.

3. As of Sunday, May 31, Pentecost Sunday, the normal Sunday Mass schedule will resume in each parish for attendance by the faithful. The following protocols will be carefully observed for the common good:

a. Appropriate social distancing will be observed. Except for families and couples, this means a spacing of 6 feet and the use of every other pew.

b. It is highly recommended that facemasks be utilized while in church except for the reception of Holy Communion. Appropriate hand sanitizers and safety wipes should be used. One must be careful to sanitize hands after arriving in church, before reception of Holy Communion, and after leaving church. Care must also be taken not to touch one's face during the Mass.

c. Holy water fonts will remain empty.

d. Only a cantor and an instrumentalist will be utilized for limited liturgical singing at the present time. Choirs and instrumental ensembles will not be present.

e. Only one reader is necessary, if at all.

f. There will be no altar servers for the present time.

g. Hymnals and other liturgical aids will not be available.

h. The priest or deacon will give a brief homily from the ambo or sanctuary but not in the midst of the congregation.

i. There will be no offertory procession for the presentation of the gifts.

j. The line for the reception of Holy Communion will also follow appropriate distancing. It is highly recommended, for the safety of others as well as the recipient, that the option of receiving the Eucharist in the hand be employed at this time.

k. Except for the celebrant, there will be no reception of the Precious Blood during this time even by the deacon. Concelebrants at Mass will receive the Precious Blood by intinction from a different chalice than that of the main celebrant.

l. The priest, deacon or extraordinary minister will wear a face mask for the distribution of Holy Communion. No gloves are to be worn by the minister or recipient.

m. There will be no sign of peace, greeting of peace before Mass or the holding of hands during the Our Father.

n. There will be no collections taken during the Mass. However, there will be collection boxes at the entrance of the church or by the sanctuary for the faithful to place their offerings. It is also recommended that online contributions be utilized. While the economic limitation imposed by this situation may be limiting to some, the continued support of parishes for the service of the faithful is needed and appreciated.

o. Churches will be appropriately sanitized.

p. There will be ushers and parish assistants available in the churches to help accommodate these protocols.

q. There will be as few people as possible in the sacristy before and after Mass. There can be no public gatherings before or after Mass.

r. The celebrant and ministers will generally process to and from the sacristy.

s. When in doubt, always err on the side of caution.

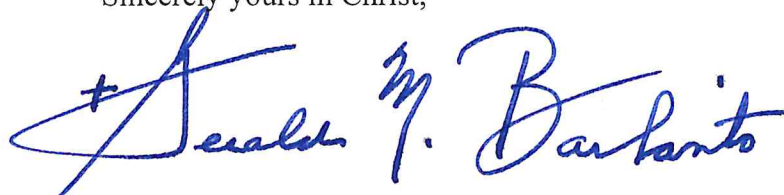
t. The live streaming of Masses in our parishes will continue.

It is very encouraging to experience your desire to return to church and I thank you for this living sign of faith. I also thank our priests for their continued assistance and cooperation during these difficult days and in showing their desire to serve as faith filled ministers of Christ. As we begin the process of the "reopening" of our churches during this Easter season and at Pentecost, I know that we will do so in a prayerful, prudent, and patient manner. No matter how limited we may be at this time, we are united as the Body of Christ and, as that Body, our respect and love for each other is what marks us as His followers. May these difficult days continue to unite us. May we continue to pray for all those so adversely affected by the coronavirus as well as for all those who have lost their lives. May our cooperation continue to bring about an end to this pandemic.

Please know of my continued prayers and remembrance at Mass for each of you and your families. I am deeply grateful for yours.

With every prayerful wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerald M. Barbarito". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "G" and a cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito
Bishop of Palm Beach

GMB/amr