



## DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

P.N. BCZ 20/12

20 May 2020

### DECREE

#### Coronavirus Update #5: Opening Churches and Public Worship

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This coming Sunday we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord into Heaven. We will listen to Christ's command, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). These powerful words to go forth as missionary disciples has continued to guide the Church victoriously for over 2000 years through natural disasters, several pandemics, world wars and other seemingly insurmountable challenges. Through the power of Christ's words, the Catholic Church continues with the heart of her mission to announce the Good News of the Gospel and, through the sacraments, share intimately in the life of the Holy Trinity. Thank you for your flexibility, steadfast faith and continued "yes" to serve Christ and his Church as missionary disciples.

As you are aware, Governor Dunleavy has announced that as of Friday, May 22 Phase III & IV of the re-opening of the State of Alaska will commence. Places of worship are now permitted to move to 100% occupancy with several health and hygiene protocols recommended. The following measures are based on the guidelines issued by the State of Alaska, CDC, USCCB, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, The Catholic Medical Association and the Thomistic Institute. These are recommended *temporary measures, and subject to change*, that the diocese is taking to reduce the possible spread of COVID-19. Thank you for being mindful and respectful of those around you who are most vulnerable to this virus, especially our elders and those with medical conditions.

#### **TEMPORARY Protocols for Attending Mass:**

- stay six feet apart from non-household members;
- wash hands frequently;
- sanitize and clean high touch surfaces frequently;
- stay home if you are sick, and get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms;
- wear a face covering in public places when near others; and
- be mindful and respectful to those Alaskans that are most vulnerable to this virus, including Alaska's senior population and those with existing health conditions.

#### **Reception of Holy Communion:**

I realize that an individual has the right to choose to receive Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue. Based on solid science and medicine it is strongly recommended that Holy Communion be received on the hand. Those who wish to receive on the tongue will be permitted to do so. However, if you choose to receive on the tongue you are accepting the increased risk of potential exposure to

COVID-19. Ministers of Holy Communion will not purify their hands between communicants. In order to maintain order during the distribution of Holy Communion, you are asked to follow the direction of the priest celebrant at Mass as to how Communion will take place.

**A general dispensation from the Sunday obligation will remain in effect:**

- Those persons who are at high risk are asked to stay home.
- Anyone who chooses not to come to Mass out of fear and concern for the Coronavirus, but is otherwise healthy, is dispensed until 1 July 2020.
- We ask that those who are not able to attend Mass in person use social media to attend your Sunday obligation and pray the prayer for Spiritual Communion.

In the next few weeks, our Stephen Ministers will contact our home bound parishioners to determine the possibility of a home visit. Protocols will be established to maintain the health and safety of both our parishioners and Stephen Ministers.

I am most grateful for your flexibility during these constantly changing times. I pray that our return to the celebration of Mass and other sacraments in our proper churches continue with the same charity, support and caution as we follow the suggested guidelines for health and hygiene. May our hearts and minds always remain focused on the Kingdom of Heaven where Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us.

*This Decree is effective immediately.*

Sincerely in Christ,



†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski  
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska  
Diocese of Fairbanks



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