



Office of the Bishop

May 22, 2020

My Dear Brother Priest:

As you may know, the bishops of California entered into a dialogue with Governor Newsom some weeks ago on the resumption of public worship, with specific emphasis on the elimination of legal barriers to public celebration of the Eucharist in its integrity in our Churches. We made clear our commitment to undertake a rigorous regime of hygiene, social distancing, and the use of masks in opening our churches, not primarily out of a sense of legal duty, but out of our enduring commitment as people of faith to serve the common good by protecting the safety of those who would participate in our liturgies. As a result of our dialogue, and in the light of Governor Newsom's press conference today, I believe that his office will issue guidelines next week that will legally support our ability to resume the Eucharist in a manner consistent with the liturgical policies that I enacted for the diocese last week and sent to you.

President Trump spoke to this question today also, urging the reopening of churches, and the Centers for Disease Control issued new guidelines on this question. Finally, I spoke today at length with Dr. Wilma Wooten, the Director of Public Health for San Diego County, and received support for our plan to reopen our parishes in a manner that will vigorously safeguard public health.

In light of these developments, I convened a meeting of the Deans and the Executive Committee of the Presbyteral Council this afternoon to determine how our parish communities should move forward to reestablish public worship. I presented three criteria: 1) our reopening should be expeditious; 2) it should implement all of the liturgical guidelines according to the plan that each parish has formulated; and 3) it must not place a terrible burden on the pastors, parish staffs and liturgical leadership.

Father McGuine indicated that his committee could complete its review of the parish plans you have designed by next Friday. It was felt that it would take another week to recruit the volunteers, carry out the communications program with your parishioners, institute social distancing plans and secure resources for adequate hygiene.

After a great deal of discussion, we concluded that the first weekend for the public celebration of the Eucharist in our parishes should be the feast of Corpus Christi, June fourteenth. This seems a beautifully symbolic and joyful feast in which to bring together anew our Eucharistic communities.

Some of the deans noted that a number of parishes have suggested beginning Mass on a weekday so as to move gradually toward the weekend crowds. Thus if a pastor wishes

to initiate daily Mass from Monday, June 8th, that will be permitted. Similarly, larger funeral Masses can be held in our churches from June 8th onward, but for the time being all funeral services in our churches must have the casket closed.

It is crucial to note that I will continue to dispense all Catholics in the Diocese of San Diego from the obligation to attend Mass for the foreseeable future. All of us must urge sick or especially vulnerable members of our communities to refrain from coming to Mass, and we must continue the wonderful online Masses that so many of you have been providing for your people in these days.

Regarding the sacraments, from the feast of Corpus Christi onward, you may celebrate first Communion in your churches respecting social distancing capacities. Those still waiting for the celebration of the Easter sacraments may receive those sacraments in large socially distanced celebrations after June 14th. I will delegate to any pastor the ability to confirm his parishioners, or alternatively Bishop Dolan and I will be more than willing to celebrate Confirmations after the fourteenth. If necessary, we will do two or more in the same parish through June, July and August.

It is a great moment that we can now move forward to resume publicly the Eucharist that is the source and summit of our ecclesial life. Tragically, we are reminded in these days of the perils of the pandemic that lie around us, for a spike in Imperial County threatens to overwhelm its health system and cause terrible sadness. I ask you to keep all of Imperial County in your prayers. This is a reminder to us all that as we implement the resumption of the Eucharist, we must remain committed to the full spectrum of safety steps embodied in our new liturgical policies.

I cannot thank you enough for all you are doing for God and His people at this time. May the Lord bless us all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. W. McElroy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy
Bishop of San Diego