

January 14, 2021

Dear Priests, Deacons, Lay Ecclesial Ministers, and Bookkeepers:

After input from our priests and parishes, we are now issuing revised COVID-19 pandemic guidelines and protocols for our parishes. We want to thank you for your cooperation in maintaining our past directives.

Dr. Thomas Dobbs, state health officer, and Dr. LouAnn Woodward, vice chancellor for health affairs at University Hospital in Jackson and our Chancellor's sister-in-law, continue to ask us to be vigilant. Our hospital system is very close to being in a severe crisis mode, which would mean a rationing of care and at some point deciding who gets an ICU bed and who does not. They have asked us to do whatever we can to minimize the risk for our people so that numbers will hopefully level off soon.

We recognize that the protocols we have asked you to follow these past couple of months were strict and specific. We implemented these directives out of an abundance of caution and concern for you and the faithful. Following these guidelines could be the difference between life and death for you and your parishioners. In reality, we know that some major Christian denominations in our state have closed down in-person activities, including suspending their worship services, which was a move we did not want to take as a Diocese. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and continued vigilance. You have been valiant facing the reality of the pandemic and we need you to continue in that vein.

We also realize that different parishes have different realities, including the size and makeup of their congregations and the facilities. Given that, we trust that you will make prudent and safe decisions based on the reality that you face in the spirit of the guidelines and

protocols that we are now asking you to follow. We have been facing the pandemic for many months now and we are all weary of this this. However, as a pastor myself, I know that making these types of decisions are not easy given our complicated reality and all the while still trying to meet the spiritual needs of our parishioners.

These are the guidelines we would like for you to follow, effective immediately, which came out of our discussion at the last priests council meeting:

- We want you to continue to follow the guidelines we have had in place for Mass. Other parish gatherings can be held at your discretion, with what you feel is safe given our protocols, not having large social events and other large parish activities.
- Adoration may be celebrated in a manner that allows for smaller groups to gather, maintaining social distancing and to reduce the time of exposure. Perhaps instead of a holy hour, make it an evening of adoration. Use your best judgement.
- All safety protocols currently in place since last March for Masses are to be strictly enforced (i.e. masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning pews and restrooms between Masses, capacity limits, a sign in sheet for all who are attending, etc.). These protocols also apply to weddings, funerals, quinceañeras, baptisms, etc.
- Flocknote has an online reservation feature that you may implement for Mass reservations to assist with capacity limits.
- Please be cognizant of photos that are posted to social media. We still see group photos of groups with priests at church celebrations where there is no social distancing and no masks. These photos make it appear that we are not following safety protocols and such group photos should not take place.
- Realize that we often let our guard down after Mass and after other liturgies and events when want to take photos and greet people. Please be cognizant of this.
- Weddings are to be small and all present must wear a mask. This includes the entire wedding party, priest or deacon, photographer, coordinator and guests. Please give these

directives to any couples with upcoming weddings through June so they may adjust their guest lists.

- Funeral Masses are permitted but are to be small and follow individual church capacity limits. Wakes and visitations in the church or other parish facilities are suspended.
- Attached are protocols for youth groups and religious education classes for children and youth. Those same general guidelines and protocols would be applicable for other parish gatherings such as the Knights of Columbus and adult religious education.

Thank you for your cooperation and patience. Blessings to all of you.

Father Lincoln Dall

Vicar General