



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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May 11, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the joy of Easter, I wish to announce the good news that in consultation with the pastors of the Diocese, we will be able to begin the outdoor public celebration of Mass on May 21, the Ascension of our Lord. This is the first step in a process that will remain consistent with Governor Ned Lamont's call for the gradual reopening of the state in a way that safeguards public health and safety. It is my hope that the reopening of our churches, which represents phase two in our planning process, may be possible soon.

Before I outline some of the proposed details for the first phase of plan, I wish to express my sincere thanks for your patience, perseverance and fidelity during this most difficult time, when public Masses were suspended. While it has been a great sacrifice for all of us, especially those who have watched a relative or friend fall ill, buried a loved one or remained in isolation and even fear, I believe that observing the state's shelter at home order has saved many lives. On behalf of all priests of the diocese, permit me to say how much we have missed you and look forward to welcoming you back home to your parish homes.

We have also been reminded that in our darkest hour, the Lord did not abandon us.

Our planning process assumes what most health experts have told us that the threat of the COVID-19 virus will be with us for some time. Whatever we plan must avoid a possible relapse in the progress we have made to eradicate this silent killer from our midst. As a result, we will move forward in a gradual, systematic and responsible manner to resume public worship safeguarding the health and safety of our clergy and faithful.

Further, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will remain dispensed for the time being while we slowly resume the public celebration of Mass. This is recognition of the fact that seating will initially be limited at each celebration of Mass due to the state's requirements for social distancing and other health mandates. It also recognizes that the elderly, who are most vulnerable, should consider remaining sheltered at home for the time being. For this reason, my hope is that each parish will continue to live stream the celebration of Mass while public worship slowly resumes.

The first phase in our plan to resume the celebration of Mass with the faithful is optional in nature and will remain in effect until Church buildings and other indoor venues can be safely reopened for worship. For those parishes that wish to offer Mass outdoors, one of two possible formats can be used. The first format will allow those who attend to be seated on chairs that will be arranged with proper social distancing. Individual outdoor seating up to 50 people. The second format will allow those who attend Mass to remain seated in their cars. The number of cars that can participate in an outdoor Mass will depend upon the size of the parking lot, the need to distance cars six feet apart from each other and allow for the safe exit of any car in case of an emergency. The outdoor venue and format for Mass will be designated by each pastor.

In order to ensure an orderly process for the celebration of Mass outdoors, a series of guidelines have been established that details many of the concerns that need to be addressed, including the use of a parish reservation system either online or over the phone for each Mass, the creation of detailed norms for the distribution of Holy Communion in a safe manner and other liturgical considerations. These norms will be posted on our diocesan website <https://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/coronavirus/home/> and I invite you to read them at your convenience. In addition, I ask that you consult your parish website for more detailed information about your parish's potential participation in this first phase of planning.

Finally, I have asked each pastor to draft a parish plan for this first phase of planning to ensure that the particular needs of his parish are properly addressed. The guiding principle behind all such planning is to ensure the safety and health of our faithful and clergy, while preserving the sacredness of our liturgy and worship.

As we take this first, hopeful step forward, I pray that the Lord Jesus will continue to bless you and your families in this time of enduring challenge. Let us look forward in joy and gratitude to worship and to celebrate our Lord's blessings once again together as a family of faith.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport