



# DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 20, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we prepare for the Solemnity of Christ the King, it is with hope and faith in Our Lord's power and desire to bring healing to our world. He is the Divine Physician, and we know that His will is to heal; He is the Good Shepherd, and we know that His will is to lead, guide and protect His sheep.

It is rooted in this confidence that I write to you again, imploring the faithful of the diocese and calling upon your goodwill. With the significant rise in positive COVID cases throughout our diocese, we must once again assess the seriousness of the situation.

Last spring, I had to make the most difficult decision of my time as Bishop, by temporarily halting Holy Mass. As we resumed Masses this summer, the dispensation of the obligation to attend Mass remained in place until September. At that time the numbers of new COVID-19 cases were relatively few. However, due to a number of factors including the start of the new school year and the fall and winter like weather keeping us inside more, over the past few weeks we have seen a drastic increase in the new, active COVID-19 cases throughout all 16 counties that make up the Diocese of Superior.

On November 10, Governor Tony Evers issued an executive order asking all Wisconsinites to stay home as much as possible and avoid large gatherings. Today, November 19, he extended his Statewide Public Health Emergency efforts plan to January 2021.

**Given the rapid increase of new, active COVID-19 cases over the past few weeks with no relief in sight, and after much prayer and consultation, I have once again decided to grant the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Superior a general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. This dispensation will remain in force until further notice.**

I pray that this action will help in preventing the further spread of this terrible disease. I further pray that this will relieve the burden of conscience many, who should not have returned to Mass after the general dispensation was lifted, were having. With the general dispensation back in place, I hope those who have health issues that put them at high risk of contracting COVID-19 or prevent them from being able to wear a mask will be able to in good conscience make the wise choice.

**I want to make it perfectly clear that with the reinstating of the General Dispensation I am NOT issuing a closure of public Masses on Sundays or weekdays. We will continue to celebrate Mass with parishioners who are able to attend and willing to follow the proper health protocols which are in force and include the wearing of appropriate masks.**

With the reissuing of the General Dispensation from the Sunday obligation you will still need to make sound and pertinent decisions for you and your family. If you are in any of the following categories:

- has tested positive for COVID-19 or come in close contact with someone who has tested positive in the past 14 days,
- are running a fever,
- has a cough or who has COVID/flu like symptoms, and/or
- are in the ‘at risk’ category due to age, compromised immune system, respiratory issues, diabetes, or if you believe attending Mass would pose an undue risk to other family members,

for your sake and for that of others please stay home and join in a Spiritual Communion via one of the virtual celebrations of the Mass being broadcast throughout the Diocese and beyond.

Although I am reinstating the General Dispensation from the Sunday obligation, I am confident that if we follow our current practices of social distancing, sanitization, face masks, and the other protocols that we have in place, those who choose to continue to attend Mass and receive the sacraments will continue to be safe.

But again, we need to be smart about what we do. In spite of your personal feelings about wearing masks, the State of Wisconsin requires the wearing of masks. Scientific evidence has shown that wearing face masks reduces the transmission of COVID-19. Despite the controversy over whether to wear one or not, we must realize that as faith-filled Catholics we adhere to the calling of God to care for others. With the increased spread of COVID-19, it is therefore our responsibility to do what we can to limit exposure of this virus and ‘slow the spread’. We need to listen to the word of God in Philippians 2:4, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

At this time, I am also instructing those parishes which have begun to reintroduce congregational singing to stop. If we offer this up as part of our Advent sacrifice, by God’s grace we will hopefully be able to joyfully join the choir of angels as they proclaim, “Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Out of love for our fellow brothers and sisters, I am asking that all parishes, schools and parish religious education programs, continue to require masks until we see a significant decline in the number of positive cases. Those who are unable to medically wear a mask are asked to take alternative precautions. This request is of course in addition to continued sanitization, social distancing, and handwashing.

At the Last Supper, Our Lord implored the Father that His Church would always be one (John 17:21). Let us all join together in solidarity with each other to do our part to slow the spread of this very contagious virus and let us refuse to allow the enemy to use these simple efforts to sow seeds of division among us.

Please know of my daily and earnest prayers for your health, safety and holiness,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Rev. James P. Powers  
Bishop, Diocese of Superior