



MOST REVEREND
MICHAEL R. COTE, D.D.

Diocese of Norwich
Office of the Bishop
201 Broadway
Norwich, Connecticut 06360
(860) 887-9294

May 27, 2020

Dear Brothers in Ministry,

Since the decision to suspend the public celebration of Mass and the Sacraments was made in mid-March, I have been greatly inspired by the many and varied efforts that you have undertaken to remain in contact with your people. Whether by calling and checking in on the elderly and infirm, or undertaking the efforts necessary to use technology in order to bring the celebration of Mass and other devotions into the homes of your parishioners, I want to thank you for all you have done, and will continue to do to help your people to encounter the presence of our Risen Lord during these challenging times.

As the State begins the multi-phase process of reopening, we have developed the attached guidelines to assist pastors and parish administrators in facilitating the resumption of public worship. These guidelines are drawn from a variety of sources and were developed in consultation with the Pastors of the Diocese, many of whom offered helpful comments to the draft presented to them. I would therefore like to thank those pastors who took the time to read and share comments on the draft. Our primary goal in issuing these guidelines is to provide necessary guidance that is rooted both in sound liturgical principles as well as to keep everyone, faithful and clergy, as safe as reasonably possible giving the present circumstances. They are based on the principle of shared responsibility and seek to balance the expectations on the part of the parish with those that can be reasonably expected of the faithful who choose to attend Mass.

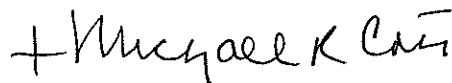
Please note that these guidelines are not meant to cover every possible consideration, scenario or challenge, but rather to assist you in developing a plan for the reopening of your particular parish(es) in consultation with your staff and parishioners. As each parish is different in many ways, e.g., size, layout, numbers of worship sites, etc., you will need to determine how best to apply these guidelines to the unique situations that you face.

In coordination with the Archdiocese of Hartford, parishes of the Diocese of Norwich may resume the public celebration of **weekday Masses ONLY, beginning Monday, June 8, 2020**. While the attached guidelines speak more generally to the resumption of Sunday Masses, for the time being the celebration of public Masses on Saturday evening and Sunday continues to be suspended until further notice. Please note: the limitation on gatherings for religious worship of **less than 50 people** established by Executive Order No. 7D (3/16/20) and as amended by Executive Order No. 7N (3/26/20) remains in effect. The Chancery will inform you if this limitation changes.

Please use the coming days and weeks to: (1) familiarize yourself with these guidelines, (2) develop a parish plan for reopening, and (3) communicate that plan to your people so that they know what to expect in your parish(es) as the celebration of Mass resumes. If you are not able to implement these guidelines fully by Monday, June 8, you should not reopen for public worship until such time as you are ready and able to do so. It is likewise important to note that, due to the limitations established by state and local authorities, as well as the need for social distancing between individuals and households which is likely to remain with us for the foreseeable future, there may be members of the faithful who either are unable or feel uncomfortable returning to Mass at this time. This would therefore seem to be an opportune time to catechize your parishioners with regard to the nature and importance of the Mass itself, the true value of making a Spiritual Communion, and the need to be properly prepared (personally as well as sacramentally) in order to receive our Eucharistic Lord in Holy Communion.

These guidelines may be amended should the circumstances warrant. The staff at the Chancery will do their best to communicate any such changes to you, as soon as possible. I will also be in communication with you once the decision has been made to resume the public celebration of Sunday Masses. Thank you for your patience and cooperation as we try to work through the various facets and challenges of reopening. Thank you also for the good work you have done and will continue to do as we seek to gather again with our people to offer fitting worship to God. Please be assured of my prayers for you, your valued priestly ministry and for the people you serve.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael R. Cofer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop of Norwich