



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

P.N. BCZ 20/11

8 May 2020

DECREE

Coronavirus Update #4, Phase II of Opening of Churches and Public Worship

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

May we hold closely the words of Christ the Good Shepherd that we listened to on the 4th Sunday of Easter, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” This Gospel verse was the theme for World Youth Day in Denver, CO in 1993. I had the honor of being present and listen to St. John Paul II passionately preach about the sacredness of life at all stages, from conception to a natural death. During this current crisis, when life and health is threatened by a pandemic, may we unite together to promote and protect the sacredness of life especially among those groups of people that are most vulnerable.

As you are aware, on Wednesday, 6 May, Governor Dunleavy announced Phase II for re-opening the State of Alaska. New guidelines are coming out for various types of businesses and public gatherings of people. This good news is based upon data indicating a reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks. Phase II simply increases the number of people we can gather in a church building. Previous health protocols published in Alaska Health Mandate 16, Attachment N and can be found on the State of Alaska COVID-19 webpage.

After reviewing documents provided to the US Bishops from working groups (comprised of scientists, medical professionals, canon lawyers and liturgists) and personally consulting a virologist and a surgeon (both devout Catholics), I am issuing the following guidance for Mass. This decision is based on solid science and medicine and in no manner is directed at any one person’s piety and reverence. These guidelines are temporary based on current public health conditions!

Based on current State of Alaska health mandate directives, attendance at Mass will be limited to 50 people or 50% capacity of the worship space, whichever is lower. All other guidelines issued in Decree #3 (P.N. BCZ 20/09) on 27 April 2020 remain in effect for the Diocese of Fairbanks. These are general guidelines based upon the State of Alaska health mandates recommended for gatherings. Each parish community is different due to its location and size. It is very important that prior to any gathering in a diocesan building that you consult city or village directives and follow the directions unique to that locale. I ask that the parishes in the Y-K Region contact Sr. Kathy Radich and those in the Middle Yukon Region contact Br. Bob Ruzicka prior to holding any gathering.

I realize that normally individuals have the right to choose how they receive Holy Communion. However, in this unprecedented time of pandemic I am asking you to make a sacrifice based upon solid science and medicine on the transmission of COVID-19 that promotes protection of life and mitigates the spread of the virus by receiving Holy Communion in the hand. I understand that this is a serious concern for some of the faithful. I would ask that you speak privately with your pastor.

I greatly appreciate your prayers and deep sacrifices made during these very challenging times. As we move forward with these new guidelines, we will evaluate the process and adjust as needed. The State of Alaska will be looking forward to moving to the next phase if the data indicates that cases of COVID-19 are being managed adequately.

This coming weekend, parishes will announce the updates for Phase II of reopening the State of Alaska. I ask for your continued flexibility and charity as schedules and numbers of Masses may change. Please know that as we continue to expand our ability to offer the Sacraments that, when air travel to the villages resumes, our urban priests will be asked to travel to the Bush to bring those same Sacraments to the faithful, some of whom have not received them in several months.

I deeply respect your sacrifices, flexibility and patience during this challenging time. As we continue to adjust to the current circumstances, may we do everything to promote the words of Christ the Good Shepherd, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

This Decree is effective immediately.

Sincerely in Christ,



†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks



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