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Dear Friends in Christ,

These fifty days of Easter, leading to Pentecost, are marked by unprecedented suffering, as humanity has fallen victim to a perilous contagion. In addition to the threats to our physical wellbeing, we are suffering spiritually as the Covid-19 pandemic has required restrictions of our worship and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Surely, there have been moments in history when governments and rulers have persecuted Christians and banned their public worship. This is not one of them. Rather, the present restrictions come in response to an extreme medical emergency as local, state and federal authorities – specifically public health officials – legitimately fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard human life and the common good. They have based their reasonable guidance on careful consideration of empirical data and the best available disease-mitigation practices as they seek to contain the pandemic’s rampage through our communities.

While everyone must exercise good citizenship in observing these restrictions, I call on the Catholic faithful, as advocates for justice and charity, to comply with these regulations. From the first pages of Scripture we learn that we indeed are “our brother’s keeper,” a truth that must inspire us as we are called to sacrifice. We should also be motivated to cooperate with public safety norms, given our reverence for life and human dignity. This is, at its heart, a moment to proclaim the breadth and depth of what it means to be pro-life, particularly as this virus preys on the most vulnerable in our midst.

The good news is that a plan for a gradual reopening of our churches has now taken shape, as I note below. However, since our movements will be restricted as that plan unfolds in different phases, your pastors and bishops will continue for the present time to offer Mass in private each day and to livestream and broadcast Masses from our parishes and the archdiocese. I am particularly grateful to ABC-TV, Univision and Polvision in Chicago for giving us airtime every Sunday. These celebrations surely are not the same as gathering in our churches for Mass, but I know from hearing from many parishioners that they provide a great deal of solace and support in this time of uncertainty.

We must be honest. We expect this situation to continue for some weeks, and any plan for reopening our churches for public worship must include every precaution to ensure public




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gatherings do not create a second wave of contagion, thus squandering the gains made through our sacrifice in these days.

With those realities in mind, I am heartened to announce that we have reached an agreement with the Office of the Governor on a multi-phase Plan for re-opening our churches for the celebration of the sacraments, private prayer, adoration and Mass. As I share the Plan with you, both by way of an Executive Summary and the full Plan in the following pages, I want to assure you of my prayers for you and your family's personal, material and spiritual wellbeing. I also express my appreciation to the many people on the archdiocesan staff and in the Office of the Governor for the many hours they have given to designing and fine tuning this agreement. Again, I call on all Catholics to seize this moment to exercise faith-filled citizenship in a way that reflects our deep regard for life, our calling as disciples of Jesus and our love of country.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Archbishop of Chicago

-enclosures-

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is an Executive Summary of the multi-phased protocols and procedures, known as the Plan, for reopening churches and resuming public participation in the sacramental life of the Church for the Catholic dioceses in Illinois. The full Plan is provided at the end of this Executive Summary. The Plan has been developed by the bishops of the Chicago Province in consultation with and the approval of state and local public health officials and civil authorities.

Four guiding principles undergird the multi-phased Plan:

1. Everything possible should be done to provide people the solace of the church's sacramental life in a timely and reasonable way.
2. The current situation in Illinois remains dangerous and fragile. While much has been achieved, there remains the potential that the gains could be lost by a second more virulent wave.
3. Trust needs to be established that the top priority in any Plan is the safety and wellbeing of people. We cannot take for granted that people will return just because churches are reopened.
4. Calling people to exercise faithful citizenship will be key. Each Catholic will need to take personal responsibility for the common good as well as their own safety.

With these principles in mind, a Plan to prudently and gradually resume the full scope of public sacramental celebrations, liturgies and faith practices, has been designed. The Plan envisions a set of required measures and phases. There will be an ongoing review of the Plan so that adjustments are made in accord with new data. The basics of the Plan are as follows:

1. A robust **communications** effort to inform parishes and parishioners of the Plan and any updates to it.
2. Each parish needs to **recruit** non-vulnerable volunteers at the parish level to assist the pastor in implementing the Plan.
3. The selected volunteers are to complete **training** by way of a webinar. The training will begin the week of May 18.
4. A required **certification** of readiness to reopen will be required of each parish at each phase. Each parish is to complete an implementation template confirming completion of all action steps and demonstrating that there are a sufficient number of trained volunteers to execute it.
5. **Phase I** allows for parishes to reopen for Baptism, Reconciliation, Weddings and Funerals with a limit of 10 attendees.
6. **Phase IA** allows for parishes to reopen for private prayer and adoration with a limit of 10 attendees. Given the training schedule noted above, it is anticipated that all parishes, if they choose to do so, could be opened by May 23 for Phase I and by May 30 for Phase IA.
7. **Phase II** allows for reopening for weekday and weekend Masses for larger groups depending on the guidelines from the state and the capacity of the church building.
8. Through ongoing discussions with pastors, health care professionals and civil authorities, there will be a **review** of the Plan at each stage with an eye to making adjustments in accord with new data.

MULTI-PHASED PLAN FOR REOPENING CHURCHES

PHASE I: Limited Sacramental Celebrations and Private Prayer

Parish Actions and Responsibilities

- The pastor will need the assistance of the parish community, as he will be required to create a parish leadership team consisting of 6 people, including himself, to co-manage operations and to supervise cleaning, set-up and greeting.
- The parish business manager or someone designated by the pastor will serve as the compliance manager for the parish and assist with the submission of necessary compliance forms.
- The entire team of leaders is required to attend training and submit an implementation template for reopening, which needs to be reviewed and certified by the archdiocese or respective diocese.
- The parish will need to maintain an on-going procurement program for safety and cleaning supplies.
- Based on go-forward approval, each parish will have the prerogative to offer Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, and Reconciliation in the church within the current limit of 10 attendees excluding ministers and on-site staff (“Phase I”).
- With additional preparation, each parish may optionally offer Eucharistic Adoration and private prayer times (“Phase IA”). In choosing to do so, parish leadership teams must comply with all published bishops’ guidelines outlining precautions preparing for, during and after the rite(s).

NOTE: During Phase I, parishes will not be allowed to offer either daily or Sunday Mass, even with 10 or fewer attendees. The resumption of public Mass, regardless of the number of attendees, is a more complex process, which requires the input of lessons that will be learned from Phase I. To that end, parishes and archdiocese or diocese will collaborate to gather data to improve the protocols and processes of the Plan before we move to worship services in Phase II.

Archdiocesan/ Diocesan Actions and Responsibilities

The archdiocese or diocese, depending on capacity, will provide the following services to support the parishes and pastors:

- Provide parishes information on securing supplies or a list of preferred vendors for supplies throughout the phases of the Plan.
- Conduct required training webinars for clergy, parish leaders and volunteers, to assist the pastor in managing the Plan in each phase. The Archdiocese of Chicago will develop a standard webinar based on these guidelines and make it available to the other dioceses in the Chicago Province.
- Create and distribute to parishes a video message from the local bishop to explain the Plan for reopening churches.

- Evaluate and certify parish proposals for opening during the phases. Create a dedicated email box that will be monitored by staff to answer questions or otherwise support parishes that feel they cannot open safely without additional help.
- Gather and evaluate data from parishes on their Phase I and IA experience to adapt Phase II protocols for larger numbers, which will include public Mass.
- Work with government officials to explore possible increases in crowd size taking into consideration the capacity of church buildings.

PHASE II: Resumption of Public Masses

Parish Actions and Responsibilities

In Phase II parishes may apply for certification to offer daily and Sunday Mass. Parishes will also continue to celebrate Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals and Adoration. Given the more complex nature of celebrations of the Mass, entering Phase II will require parishes to:

- Expand the number of parish team members if civil authorities permit an increase in the crowd size for Phase II.
- Maintain an on-going procurement program for safety and cleaning supplies.
- Continue recruitment and training of new, non-vulnerable volunteers as needed.
- Develop logistical procedures in accord with the guidelines of the Plan to manage more frequent and larger services that cover actions before, during and after the rites.
- Implement a safe and secure attendance reservation/ ticketing system to maintain order and facilitate possible contact tracing of infection.
- Submit a detailed proposal for implementing Phase II.

Archdiocesan Actions and Responsibilities

To support the parishes in the preparation and implementation of Phase II, the Archdiocese or diocese will:

- Establish and update requirements for all services and rites according to the standards of government officials, health care experts and church authorities.
- Review and certify all parish proposals for reopening with celebration of Mass.
- Provide additional required webinars and training, as needed.
- Create and distribute to parishes a video message from the local bishop to explain procedures for attendance at Mass in Phase II.
- Conduct random assessments over time to ensure continued compliance with published requirements.

- Gather feedback from parishioners across the Archdiocese or diocese on how well the safety protocols are working and how comfortable they are with church precautions for their safety.
- Continually monitor feedback on execution and resources to assist in problem solving through ongoing communication with parish leadership, state and local authorities and public health officials.