



DIocese OF GAYLORD

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July 3, 2020

Dear Friends:

It is with a sense of joy and peace that I find myself with you here, embarking on a journey in the most northern region (of the lower peninsula) of the state that I have been blessed to call home for many years. You are likely aware by now that I have been appointed as the apostolic administrator of this diocese during this season of transition — I want you to know that I feel very honored to serve you alongside my brother priests here, particularly, as I have expressed to them, during these troublesome and challenging days. I look forward to serving in the Diocese of Gaylord and am grateful for the warm welcome I have received in the short time I have been here. The hospitality and generosity have been overwhelming, a true reflection of the love our Lord asks us to pour out on neighbor!

In this time between bishops, I want you to know of my hope and desire to be a source of support to your priests in their ministries, and to you, in any way possible. To that end, I met informally yesterday with the priests consultors over lunch, and I want to share with you some reflections on their thoughts and suggestions to me.

CARING FOR EACH OTHER

In these unprecedented times, I recognize the sacrifices everyone has made and the extra challenges our priests and clergy face in providing pastoral care to their “flock.” As demanding as it is to remain vigilant in observing the health protocols and safety measures in our parishes, it is critical that we must continue, together, to do so in order to protect and safeguard the health of others.

After discussion with the consultors regarding the safety issues associated with returning to public Mass, there seems to be a lack of clarity of the protocols and expectations for attending Mass on Sunday and other days. The consultors strongly feel it is important to clarify, *prior to this Sunday*:

- The use of masks is expected in our parish churches.
- Social distancing should be the norm in our parishes and at parish and diocesan events.

The consultors and I feel that it is very important to take these measures for the safety and well-being of all, particularly given the large number of visitors in this diocese. These safety measures are also the strong recommendation of the medical professionals. A number of priests and bishops in other dioceses have contracted COVID-19, as well as individuals in our own diocese. Among those who have contracted the coronavirus is Archbishop Gregory Aymond, the Archbishop of New Orleans, who has written a very powerful article on this matter that is worthy of our reflection: <https://clarionherald.org/news/wearing-a-mask-displays-true-love-of-neighbor>. Bearing all this in mind, *I am requesting that you continue to wear a mask when you attend Mass, so long as you are medically able to do so.*

MUSIC

Because the CDC has indicated COVID-19 is spread *orally* by water droplets, I encourage singing be done by the music directors and cantors during this time. Robust singing by the congregation should be very minimal, if at all.

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SEMINARIAN FUND COLLECTION

These have been challenging times for the parishes financially, amplified by the recent kickoff of the Catholic Services Appeal (CSA). After discussing the matter with the consultants, we will not have the Seminarian Collection this year (August) so that you can continue, to the extent that you are able, your support to your parish and the CSA. If you are able to make a contribution to the seminarian fund, it will gladly be accepted of course! Your parish will forward these gifts to the diocesan office.

DIOCESAN OFFICE REOPENING

The Diocesan Pastoral Center will reopen on Monday, July 6, with staff returning to the office. Visitors are expected to wear masks.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

As the Apostolic Administrator, you might note that, beginning this weekend, my name is included in the Eucharistic prayer — I am grateful for your prayers and your support.

I look forward to making visits to your parishes, visiting in the upcoming weekends throughout the remaining time that I am with you. Each parish community is a unique family whose differences are unified by our commonality as children of God, and it will be a joy for me to meet you and witness the special vibrancy of your church. I will be at the Cathedral this Saturday evening, at St. Mary/St. Charles this Sunday, and I will continue to visit parishes each weekend thereafter. Please know that no special arrangements need be made other than the usual arrangements for Mass.

I am grateful to be here with you and look forward to all that God has in store. With thanksgiving, may we keep our eyes fixed on our Lord during this season of transition, recalling that He is the unchanging and immovable anchor of our soul.

God bless, and stay tuned!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley
Apostolic Administrator of Gaylord