



## ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF REGINA OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ of the Archdiocese of Regina,

Warm greetings in the Risen Lord. Today when the provincial government announced numbers of cases of COVID-19 in the province, we could see that at present there are no known active cases of the virus in Regina, nor anywhere else in the Archdiocese. That is exceptionally good news. Heartfelt thanks to frontline workers, and to all who have made sacrifices in order to minimize the spread of the virus and to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities. We continue to stand in solidarity with places and people that are less fortunate. And we pray especially for the people of La Loche, who have been hit hard by the recent outbreak there.

After much discussion and discernment, and provided that our situation remains stable within the Archdiocese, we have made the decision to allow Masses of up to 10 persons in our parishes beginning on the weekend of Pentecost at the end of this month. Detailed directives about how we are to proceed will be made available early next week. These will address the preparations that will need to be carried out prior to the celebration of the Eucharist, safety measures for during the Mass and the reception of communion, and cleaning to take place after the celebration, to ensure that all health directives are met. To keep the numbers at a legal limit, and to ensure that equal opportunity is provided to anyone who wishes to attend Mass, each pastor or administrator is going to need a system by which people can sign up to attend a particular celebration. The guidelines will be clear, consistent and concise, but will be somewhat onerous to carry out. That is the cost of doing everything we can to ensure people's safety. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass will remain in place during this time when numbers are restricted by government and health authorities.

The decision to proceed was reached after long conversations with laity and clergy. The Archdiocesan Pastoral Council urged us to be very cautious in taking steps towards reopening our churches. The Council of Priests deliberated at length, and a working group reviewed input from other dioceses, as well as carefully studying the current health directives to make sure that what we were proposing was within the acceptable parameters. We continue to work with other faith communities in seeking clearer directives from the provincial government, which will shape how we proceed going forward. We also listened to those who urged us strongly to reopen our liturgical celebrations to the extent legally possible for the *spiritual wellbeing* of the faithful, as well as those who recommended that we proceed with greatest caution for the *physical wellbeing* of people. Faithfulness to God has required listening to both perspectives, which are equally important.

Until Pentecost, much is still possible, as is detailed in the church and sacramental guidelines posted on the archdiocesan website, guidelines which have been in place for several weeks. These include celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation, private prayer in churches, celebrating baptisms and funerals - but always working within the limits set by the government directives currently in place. Some of these activities have been going on in your parishes in recent weeks, and that is a good thing. This has looked somewhat different from one parish to the next, as priests and parish councils have deliberated regarding what is appropriate and responsible in their particular contexts. Masses will continue to be livestreamed so that all in the Archdiocese are able to participate in Mass in that way. We continue to reach out, on parish and diocesan levels, to accompany you in whatever ways are possible.

Dear friends, these next steps are not going to be easy. Even after Pentecost, with numbers for gatherings restricted by provincial directives, only a small percentage of the people of the Archdiocese are going to be able to participate in person at a Mass any time soon. For some, that will be because you belong to large parishes. Others of you will not be attending Mass for health reasons or because you are part of the vulnerable sector of the population. Those who are able to attend a Mass are strongly encouraged to come bringing the prayers of others not able to be present, such as prayers for our Elect, who are eagerly awaiting their sacraments of initiation, and for the many people who are suffering or struggling at present. The Mass is not meant to be limited in numbers, and there are going to be tensions as we find a way forward. I would encourage you to remember that God's grace is with us, as much now as ever. Let us be patient, show kindness and mercy to each other, and live this challenging time as generously and compassionately as possible.

I would like to close this letter with excerpts from two prayers that Pope Francis has been praying during this time of pandemic. The first is a prayer to Mary:

O Mary, you shine continuously on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope.  
Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the Father's will and to do what Jesus tells us:  
He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and bore our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

The second prayer includes excerpts of a much longer litany to Jesus:

Our Savior, God with us, faithful and rich in mercy  
We adore you, O Lord.  
King and Lord of creation and of history,  
Conqueror of sin and death,  
Friend of humankind, the Risen One, the Living One who sits at the right hand of the Father.  
We adore you, O Lord.

Should sin oppress us  
Open us to hope, O Lord.  
Should hatred close our hearts,  
Should sorrow visit us,  
Should indifference cause us anguish,  
Should death overwhelm us,  
Open us to hope, O Lord.

Protect your Church which crosses the desert,  
Comfort us, O Lord.  
Protect humanity terrified by fear and anguish,  
Protect the sick and the dying, oppressed by loneliness,  
Protect doctors and healthcare providers exhausted by the difficulties they are experiencing,  
Protect politicians and decision makers who bear the weight of having to make decisions,  
Comfort us, O Lord.

God bless you all.



✠ Donald Bolen  
Archbishop of Regina

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