



Office of the Bishop

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June 20, 2020 The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dear Clergy, (Pastoral Letter 20/2020)

On June 15, representatives of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith communities had an online meeting with Dr. Robert Strang. In addition to providing us with an update, he indicated that there could be an announcement soon about increasing the number of those who may gather from 10 to 50 people. Yesterday we received that announcement. This is good news, in that it means that we may now plan for the re-opening our places of worship. I asked if the province would consider allowing a percentage of people gathering in our places of worship. We were told that this might be considered in the future but any percentage would need to be based on the seating capacity while maintaining 2 meters or 6 feet physical distancing.

As a Diocese, we must work together and assume the responsibility for re-opening our churches for the public celebration of Mass and the sacraments. A sub-committee of the Council of Priests has been finalizing guidelines for when the bishop announces the re-opening our churches. Having reviewed a number of guidelines from many dioceses, we have chosen to follow the directives issued by the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth with some modifications.

Please remember that even if, the province allows for a larger gathering of people, it is still up to the bishop to decide when we are ready to re-open our churches after consultation with our pastors. We have already had that discussion at our recent Council of Priests meeting and a number of pastors have already expressed great concern for the safety of the faithful if we are not prepared. We need your full co-operation and patience as we do our very best to welcome back the faithful, even in limited numbers.

As Bishop, I am prepared to allow that our churches may re-open for public worship with no more than 50 people present beginning the weekend of July 4/5 the 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time PROVIDED we can follow our diocesan protocols which require cleaning and disinfecting, as well as ensuring the required physical distancing at all times. Not all of our parishes are prepared to re-open so soon and that is fine. We need to be confident that we have the volunteers we need as well as, the cleaning supplies and instructional information in place. Those who may not be able to attend church for health reasons or due to capacity restrictions are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. I encourage parishes to continue to livestream, video or provide radio coverage of Masses.

Bishop Kirkpatrick