



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

November 23, 2020

Dear Diocesan Family,

I had hoped that I would not have to write another letter regarding the imposition of restrictions on public worship. However, due to the surge of COVID-19 in parts of the Diocese of Syracuse and the imposition of the “Orange Zone” in parts of the City of Syracuse, Dewitt, Solvay, and Lyncourt, new restrictions have been placed on a variety of activities including Houses of Worship. The norm for Houses of Worship in the “Orange Zone” is 33% capacity with no more than 25 congregants at a time. Naturally, on Sundays and for funerals and marriages this may create some problems. However, barring a modification in the rules, I feel that we must abide by these restrictions for the greater public good.

In the affected areas, I direct that the churches must remain open and that Sunday and weekday Masses are still to be offered, even if for a reduced congregation. Also, the planned hours for the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) should be maintained. As Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Mt. 18:20).

If possible, maybe neighboring parishes which do not have “Orange Zone” restrictions could provide space for additional Sunday Masses or the use of a parish church for Funerals or Weddings. It is hoped by local civil authorities that this period of restriction will be not be of a lengthy duration. Yet, what better way could we spend our Advent season as a Diocesan church by providing room for those in need.

I think it is important to be clear that this is not a direct attack on religion or religious gatherings. Rather, it is a response to the spread of a deadly disease which in part has occurred because some individuals within our communities have chosen to disregard important safety protocols, i.e., not wearing masks, not social distancing, and having large gatherings. That is why my heart especially goes out to those business owners who have been doing everything right and still must now shut down their businesses for a period of time and lose more income. It is also why I grieve for those in hospitals and adult care facilities who will be unable to receive visitors.

I want to be clear as well that both city and county officials have been most complimentary of the safety protocols being used in our parishes. The present crisis has not arisen from our worshipping communities. Unfortunately, just like local businesses and health care facilities, we are facing the sad consequences of irresponsible conduct.

As we prepare to celebrate our national day of Thanksgiving on Thursday and enter into the holy season of Advent this coming weekend, know my prayers are with you and your loved ones. Although this will certainly be a different holiday season for many of us, let us enter into the spirit of the season where we give glory to God by the care we show to one another even when social distancing. God’s blessings!

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse

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