



Diocese of Brownsville

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Office of the Bishop

May 27, 2021

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The local pandemic situation has improved substantially, thanks in large part to the health precautions implemented during the course of the last year, and to the percentage of persons who have received the available vaccines. We must still be vigilant and I encourage those who have not received the vaccine seriously to consider doing so, for their own good and that of the wider community.

Because of the improved situation, it is now possible to amend the pandemic protocols for parishes and mission churches in the Diocese of Brownsville. After extensive consultation, I have amended the pandemic protocols in the following ways:

Beginning with the liturgical celebration of Trinity Sunday on the evening of Saturday, May 29, 2021, the limitation of capacity based on use of every other pew is no longer in force. Every pew may now be used for seating. Three feet between family groups remains in effect, however.

Face coverings and masks are strongly encouraged but will not be required for those fully vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated should continue to use face coverings at Mass and other celebrations, for their own safety and that of others. Our churches will not, however, ask for proof of vaccination. The rule is: think of others before you go to Mass.

Also effective on the evening of May 29, 2021, the temporary suspension of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue is removed. Holy Communion may be received on the tongue, or in the hand, at the communicant's discretion. Ordinary and Extraordinarily ministers of Holy Communion should use masks when distributing the Sacred Host, and should sanitize their hands before and after the Communion Rite. While distributing Communion, care should be taken by the minister of Communion to avoid contact with the communicant, and sanitizer should be available for the ministers of communion while distribution takes place.

The temporary suspension of receiving the Precious Blood from the chalice remains in effect until withdrawn by me.

The general dispensation from the Sunday obligation remains in effect for all Catholics within the Diocese of Brownsville. Those who consider that their health vulnerabilities make it unwise to attend Sunday Mass may want to consider attending a Mass during the week. Those who think

they may have been exposed to the virus should take a test or wait three days before returning to Mass. Those who have been ill, are asked to stay home until they are past all symptoms for 24 hours.

All Churches and mission chapels should continue to sanitize their facilities on a regular basis; this means at least at the end of any day when the Church has been in use. Hand sanitizer should continue to be available at appropriate locations in the Churches. It is no longer necessary take the temperature of those attending Mass or other services.

Printed materials and hymn books may return for use in the churches. Altar servers are encouraged to return to their assistance at Masses. And music ministries may return also. At the discretion of the pastor, offertory baskets may be passed during Liturgies to members of the congregation. The offertory procession of bread and wine may also resume.

Churches can remain open during the day for the visits of the faithful, according to the custom of the place. Adoration chapels for the Blessed Sacrament may resume operation. Sacred places, chapels and shrines visited by the faithful should be sanitized at the end of the day.

Holy Water fonts are to remain empty until further notice. At the Sign of Peace, the faithful should continue to greet each other with a simple bow of the head.

The protocols previously established for the priest celebrating Mass, for deacons and for other ministers of the altar remain in effect. This means that face coverings are worn when there is proximity to the sacred vessels, and to other ministers. The priest should receive the Precious Blood from his own chalice, and purify the vessels afterwards. Deacons, if they are to receive the Precious Blood, should partake of a distinct chalice.

Funerals, weddings, visits to the sick and other pastoral activities should take place with appropriate care, including the protocols outlined above.

Popular processions may resume following the guidelines in force in local cities and counties. Appropriate social distances should be observed whenever there is a procession, and people are encouraged to walk as family groups and households.

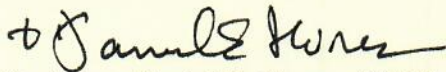
Parish events in facilities other than Church buildings may adjust their activities following the general norms outlined above for celebration of Mass. Food distribution in parish halls should continue to follow the guidelines previously issued. Pastors may permit parish groups and associations to use parish facilities for meetings provided the general norms outlined above are observed and the room is sanitized at the end of the day.

Parishes may begin planning their parish festivals for the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022. Obviously if conditions change for the worse, we may have to delay those festivals, but I am hopeful that with the proper care and training, our festivals will be able to resume in due course.

We must continue to exercise great care to prevent the further spread of the virus. We do not know if in the future localized outbreaks will occur, or if variants of the virus will significantly affect our local communities. Should current conditions change, and new dangers arise, we should be prepared to implement the safety protocols appropriate at that time.

May God the Most Holy Trinity be our strength and our wisdom as we move forward in hope. And may the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary accompany our every step.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel E. Flores". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D.
Bishop of Brownsville