



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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June 6, 2020

The Month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I wish to update you on the status of the celebration of Holy Mass with the faithful present. In mid-March, we complied with the New York State "PAUSE" executive order and suspended the celebration of Holy Mass with the members of the faithful present. This decision was difficult and painful for me, for the priests and certainly for you, the faithful. Since that date, we have voiced our concern to civic officials about the rights and needs of our people to practice their faith. Over the last five weeks, we have worked with the State's administration, seeking information and guidance about where churches and houses of worship fall within the State's 4-phase *New York Forward* plan. We submitted to the governor's administration, through the established Regional Control Rooms, the appropriate measures to be taken for the administration of the Sacraments in a prudent manner. It appears these efforts have produced some results. **Today, June 6, 2020, the governor announced that effective immediately, all churches located in our Diocese (regions of New York which are in "Phase 2") may have a capacity of twenty-five (25) percent of each church's total occupancy.** While this is progress, as we go forward we remain conscious of the rights of the faithful to worship.

On our diocesan website, www.dor.org, we have published the instructions sent to our parishes so they can prepare for the celebration of the Sacraments with more reasonable numbers of the faithful present, while taking all necessary precautions. As noted above, these plans were shared with the governor's office. These plans were based upon many sources, including the work undertaken by the *Thomistic Institute*, comprised of medical experts and theologians, as well from the wisdom and experiences from many other dioceses throughout the United States who have already been able to offer Mass with a reasonable number of the faithful present. It is apparent that we can publicly worship in church in a manner that is worthy of God and also prudent to safeguard the well-being of our brothers and sisters. This is what our parishes are able to do with twenty-five (25) percent occupancy.

Due to the prevalence of the Coronavirus which remains in society, **the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will remain until further notice.** I also recognize that for various circumstances, some parishes may not immediately be able to begin Mass with the faithful present. I ask that you work cooperatively with the leadership at your parish who, together with many volunteers, are working so diligently to prepare for Mass with the faithful present.

It is my prayer and hope that as we progress with gradual, yet determined efforts to make Holy Mass and the Sacraments available to more of the faithful, the State will give just consideration for the place of prayer and worship in our society. I renew my desire to work cooperatively with State officials in the days ahead.

I ask you to join me in praying for our parishes and our parishioners who have suffered so greatly over these past three months and who long to encounter Jesus Christ in the Sacraments. At the same time, please continue to pray for all who have been so adversely affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, for those who serve in the healthcare profession, for those who are working to find a vaccine through morally acceptable means and for all agencies, workers and volunteers who are providing so many services to our communities. May Jesus, in this month dedicated to His Most Sacred Heart, intercede on our behalf.

Assuring you of my prayers and asking a continued remembrance in your good prayers, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Salvatore R. Matano*
The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester