

To the faithful of the Diocese of Thunder Bay,

I pray that you and your families are safe and healthy during these challenging days.

I want to let you know that soon our parishes will be opening again. As you know, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed our day to day lives in countless ways. As we are still navigating through a fluid and difficult situation, to open our churches in this environment will require some changes that will be uncomfortable and at times frustrating for all of us. I ask for your patience in advance as we do our very best to welcome you back.

As we move into this re-opening phase, the following priorities guide our planning: 1) The health and safety of the faithful, clergy, staff and volunteers. 2) Proactive measures to avoid the potential of a second surge of this virus. 3) Recognizing the very basic commandment – love of neighbour – we have a responsibility to care for one another.

To accomplish these will require certain procedures that are very different from what we've known. Some of these are outlined in the guidelines enclosed, others you will hear directly from your pastor and through parish communication channels.

Be assured that a detailed “return plan” has been shared with all of our parishes and will be implemented in the days ahead. We pray that these measures will be temporary; for this to be the case, each one of us must follow the advice of local health authorities to minimize any potential transmission of the virus. For those who are sick, have a compromised immune system or feel uncomfortable returning to church at this time, a dispensation from Sunday Mass remains during this period of uncertainty.

Given the capacity restrictions that are in place as we re-open churches, we will also continue to livestream Masses wherever possible, recognizing all will not be able to gather at this time. Local parishes will also communicate their plans regarding their Mass schedules and other logistics related to attendance and re-opening.

We will need to adapt to the situation as it unfolds. Approaching these uncertain days with a spirit of kindness and generosity to one another will help us all as we navigate the path ahead. Again, I continue to dispense anyone from the obligation of Sunday Mass, if they feel uneasy about returning to Mass at this time.

May we continue to pray for the sick, those who have died during this pandemic and for those caring for them. May, Mary Our Lady of Charity, pray for us and guide us.

Sincerely in Christ,

*+Fred J. Colli*

Bishop of Thunder Bay