



Office of the Bishop
Roman Catholic Diocese of Lubbock

August 20, 2020

Hello Friends in Lubbock and on the South Plains!

It has been a while since I have come to you by means of video message. I felt this might be a good time to reach out as many schools get back into session. I know it's a scary time for many of our moms and dads. The youngsters are probably glad to see their friends again even though it does mean being in school again. The long hot summer will hopefully be wrapping up in the next few weeks. And as a society we will continue feeling our way through some different steps in the pandemic which is still menacing us.

Please know that I have some fear myself with the opening of schools and with Texas Tech and our other college campuses open again, even with the precautions they are taking. Those activities are going to provide us members of Church with some ideas of what we might be able to do as we move forward through the pandemic.

For now, let me remind you of measures which are still in place for Catholics of the Diocese of Lubbock. The Sunday Mass obligation continues to be dispensed until further notice. How long that dispensation will be in place I simply do not know. But as a spiritual father I simply am not comfortable mandating that the commandment to keep holy the Lord's Day requires all of you be present inside our churches for weekend Masses. There are other creative ways to observe the sacredness of the Lord's Day which protect our safety right now. I know many of you have discovered such ways during the past 5 months.

At this time I am not making any changes to the guidance of how our churches may be open – with distancing, sanitizing, and other measures which prevent us from gathering and socializing as we would like. Where the virus has turned up in our churches, those parishes have been working with the local health authorities and continue doing so. Your Pastors who are on the ground with you in your towns and neighborhoods know what is best for your communities and when they feel it necessary to keep the churches closed for a period of time. I am, however, continuing to insist that when you are on the properties of our parishes or diocesan entities you must be wearing a facial covering. Thank you for your observance of that, uncomfortable as it is.

And I continue to recommend, actually I beg, those of you whose health condition and age make you vulnerable to the disease, to stay home as much as possible. At 66 years old I am trying to be very responsible about my own behavior and the precautions I take.

As school gets started, I know that our parish catechetical leaders and families are wondering about our Faith Formation programs and even the RCIA processes in our parishes. I have asked parishes to hold off

registration for their faith formation programs until after Labor Day. I have wanted our Parish Catechetical Leaders in conjunction with their Pastors and volunteers to concentrate on preparing materials that can be effectively used in your homes for those who are uncomfortable with in-person sessions and in case it becomes impossible to conduct classes in person. The diocesan Office of Evangelization and Family Faith Formation has produced lesson plans for in home faith formation throughout the remainder of this calendar year if necessary.

After consultation with the Presbyteral Council this week let me tell you where we stand right now. It has been recommended that we move into a new phase of reopening our parish facilities for faith formation gatherings only, for those who are comfortable with in-person sessions right now.

Beginning Sunday, September 27, the new policy may be implemented with the following requirements:

- Masks are still mandatory at all times on parish/diocesan property, beginning at the age determined by the local school district
- Social distancing of at least 6 feet must be observed except among members of the same household
- Thorough sanitizing of surfaces must be done after any gathering
- Non-worship spaces may be occupied at only less than 50% capacity
- Any gathering of 100 people or more must receive approval of the local Mayor
- It is suggested that local health authorities be contacted to assure that all measures are in compliance with local regulations
- Parish facilities may be used for faith formation classes/groups of children, youth, or adults if the above stipulations can be observed
- No food or drink may be served during any session
- Extra care must be taken to assure that, as people leave, they do not congregate in small groups on the parish property
- In choosing who makes use of parish facilities, priority is to be given to formation groups preparing for Sacraments (RCIA, Confirmation, First Eucharist, First Reconciliation, Baptism)
- The Pastor of each parish, in consultation with his staff and team of advisors, may determine the extent to which they can make their facilities available for faith formation gatherings; these stipulations may not be exceeded by any parish.

At this time, we are still not making our facilities available for parish organizations, for social gatherings, nor may they be rented out for any purpose. Consideration of such will be given in the future as we see the extent of further spread of the virus.

This pandemic is calling upon us to broaden our expectations in every area of our lives -- our expectations of what it means to be family, our expectations of leadership, our expectations of who our neighbor really is, our expectations of what it means to be a faithful Catholic, our expectations of achievement in school, our expectations of what we can expect of employees and employers, and our expectations of who is “worthy” or “ready” to receive Sacraments.

But our God expects of us the same behavior that has always been expected of us as faithful followers of Jesus Christ – that we love the Lord our God with our whole being, and that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That love entails a respect for the dignity of every human life. Recently I issued a written response to the attempts being made by Planned Parenthood to return to the Lubbock area. My response sets forth the

manifold ways in which we must respect the dignity of every human life. I suggest you read that statement which is available on the diocesan website. I think it gives you some food for thought as we move forward through this pandemic, into a very contentious election season, and toward a new year in 2021 – which we all hope will look very different than has 2020.

My dear people, know of my care and concern for you. Please take care of yourselves and your family members and friends. And let us hold in prayer our communities of faith, our neighborhoods and towns, and our own society in general. We do so in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God bless you and keep you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Robert M. Coerver". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert M. Coerver

Bishop of Lubbock

August 20, 2020