



Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith

Office of the Bishop

www.mfsdiocese.ca
bishop@mfsdiocese.ca

5117-52nd Street
Yellowknife, NT X1A 1T7

Tel: 867-920-2129
Fax: 867-873-9021

May 20, 2020

To all Pastoral Leaders and Catholic Faithful of the Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese.

Re: COVID-19 Update

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I am writing to update you on the current and future state of our diocese in light of the territorial government's plan for "[Emerging Wisely](#)" as we are slowly released from the social restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. I encourage you to download and read the government document for yourselves.

Three Phases of Emerging Wisely

In brief, with respect to its effects on our gathering as a faith community, the plan is broken down into three phases.

Phase one, which began last Friday, allows friendship circles in private homes of up to 10 people and outdoor gatherings of up to 25 people.

Our response to phase one is dependent on many factors which include the size of our communities and the current weather conditions in our various regions.

Some of our parishes are going to experiment with outdoor Masses on weekdays and Sundays. Other communities are going to wait until we can be indoors again. Some of our communities are going to experiment with encouraging home-based prayer gatherings (not larger than 10 people) which will include a family unit and close friends.

Because our regions and communities are all unique I encourage you to contact your local faith leader to find out what is happening in your region or community. If you cannot contact them or do not know who to contact please contact Fatima Lee at the diocesan center and together we will try to help you.

If all goes well, Phase two will begin in mid to late June.

Phase two will allow us to move back into our churches with up to 25 people at a time or, with social distancing in place, up to the maximum capacity of our churches. It is during this phase that a more normal celebration of the Eucharist will be able to take place indoors. However, these celebrations will still be limited in size and there will be a continued emphasis on safety protocols.

For some of our communities with large churches and small congregations it may look like life is back to normal. For our larger centers accommodating to the regulations will mean more Masses scheduled and asking people to pre-register to attend Mass in order to control numbers. These procedures are currently being figured out by our pastoral leaders and

they will be letting you know how things will work as the time approaches. Again, if you need information and cannot find it when the time comes, please contact the Diocesan Pastoral Center.

It is likely that these restrictions will remain in place for some time, even through **Phase 3** which occurs after the second wave of the epidemic passes and there are falling number of new cases. The final lifting of all restrictions will depend on the introduction of a vaccine or a treatment for the virus.

Our Immediate Goal for the Diocese

Our goal for our diocese at this time is to make the Eucharist and other Sacraments available even though access will still be limited. For this reason, I am keeping the dispensation from the Obligation for the Faithful to Participate in the Sunday Eucharist in place, until such a time that these celebrations are accessible to all people and that you can go to a Mass of your choosing without the need to pre-register.

At this time Reconciliation can take place by making an appointment with your pastor. Plans for preparing for baptisms and weddings can begin, but know that you cannot expect any church celebrations until Phase 2 begins and at that point only limited numbers may attend the church. Likewise, the number who can be present in church for the celebration of funerals will also remain limited once phase 2 begins.

Conclusion

We have come far together on a path which has not been easy to walk. I would like to thank you for your on-going cooperation and patience. Many of the things that have been asked of us have gone against the grain of our traditions and instinct. We have done this not through the strength of our will but by the Grace of God and Grace will help us persevere.

We still have far to go and the sacrifices are not over but now we see a light at the end of the tunnel and we can strengthen our resolve to continue to move forward carefully and with patience.

May God continue to bless you and keep you.

+Jon