



May 9, 2020  
Vigil of Fifth Sunday of Easter

Dear Friends in Christ,

For these weeks of pandemic self-discipline practices, we may have at times felt left out of the community where sacraments are celebrated. Yet my hope is that we all have come to deeper belief that God’s Spirit—the Spirit of the Risen Jesus—seeks out where we are, as we are.

The coronavirus contagion has afforded us plenty of chances to give witness that we are a prophetic people in Christ. But let’s be honest: the live-streaming Masses, even more than the Zoom and FaceTime encounters with loved ones and colleagues—are far from fully satisfying. Nothing less than actual reception of Holy Communion in the context of the Mass that is both source and summit of Christ’s abundant life can allow us to sigh and say, “Ah, home at last!”

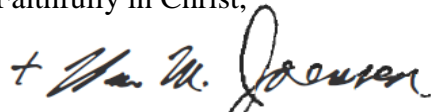
At this writing, and with the Feast of God’s Spirit at Pentecost approaching on the last day of May, it remains uncertain when that glorious day when we are able to regather and participate in public Mass—and celebrate baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmation and other sacraments as a full community--will occur. God willing, it will arrive very soon, based on a reasonable decline in the incidence of COVID-19 in our part of Iowa. Our regathering task force composed of both priests and lay people has been hard at work to help outline the preparations and conditions in our churches that we must prudently observe in order to protect as much as reasonably possible the physical and spiritual well-being of our Des Moines Diocese family.

Following this letter is a brief information document from the task force that should give you an overall sense of our Phase 1 plan for regathering for Mass. Note well that after I make the determination, and with your local pastor's discernment and decision that appropriate precautions are in place, we will first resume periodic weekday Masses (Monday-Saturday morning). Further details about liturgical practices have been shared with the priests, and will be communicated to everyone in the near future. Eventually, we will move into Phase 2 and resume Saturday evening and Sunday Masses. Even when we do so, please know that with respect to the vulnerable members of our communities whom we want to protect and not spread the virus, the SUNDAY MASS OBLIGATION REMAINS SUSPENDED.

I pray that all of us—myself included—will charitably embrace the gradual manner in which we resume a Eucharistic rhythm of life, for reasons of necessary social distancing and due diligence in cleaning and restoring our churches to a safe environment each time we gather for Mass. We cannot all rush the altar at the same time, heedless of our neighbor whose holy longing is equal to our own.

May God's Spirit, the Spirit of charity and abundant life, the Spirit of a prophetic, priestly people, be with us where we now are, and where God will have us be: united as one Body, more than ever before.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. M. Joensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "W".

Most. Rev. William M. Joensen, Ph.D.  
Bishop of Des Moines