



Diocese of Gallup

Office of the Bishop
Post Office Box 1338
Gallup, New Mexico 87305-1338

April 24, 2022
Sunday of Divine Mercy

Dear Faithful People of the Diocese of Gallup,

Greetings for the Season of Easter as we celebrate the joy of knowing our Savior as the risen Lord. This year it is also a time of some relief from the stress that all have experienced due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. We are grateful for the news that the disease incidence continues to diminish.

As part of the return to customary activity, I believe that the time has come to return to our discipline of regular worship as God's people in assembly at Mass. The obligation for Catholic people of the Diocese of Gallup to attend Sunday Mass weekly is hereby restored effective on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 24, 2022. This goes into effect for each person upon receiving the instruction by the posting and reading of this letter in the various entities of the Diocese of Gallup or as presented in our Diocesan media.

One of the most difficult challenges for our church during this Pandemic has been the constraint on our ability to freely gather to praise God and, especially, to receive the Holy Eucharist, the nourishing food for support of our spiritual journey in this life and a foretaste of our life in eternity with the Lord at his banquet table. I pray that the absence we have experienced will truly make our hearts grow fonder of the privilege to receive our Lord's Body and Blood together as God's family. It is a time for renewal of our faith in the teachings of the church that we receive the Eucharist as Jesus intended, "this is my body" and "this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26)

My decision is not oblivious of the fact that some risk from the contagious disease still exists. However, in this life we are never without some measure of risk from the phenomena of nature and the state of human existence (such as floods, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, accidents, and war). God has given us minds to assess the hazards of daily life and to exercise prudence to reduce unnecessary risk. In that vein, there will still be some limitations in the way we celebrate Mass until more time has passed. Communion will only be distributed under one species (the Precious Body). The Sign of Peace will be conducted only between the celebrant and the assembly, omitting the exchange of the Sign between those assembled. Increased attention to hand hygiene is advised.

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Just as prior to the pandemic, it is understood that persons who are ill are dispensed from attending Mass and, out of concern for others, should not attend. This would also apply for those who need to remain home to attend to persons who are ill or unable to care for themselves. Those who have medical conditions that make it unsafe to go into places of public gathering or close human contact like restaurants, movies, gyms, *et cetera* would also be excused. I understand that that some people are still apprehensive to go in public places due to the risk they perceive. In particular, persons with immune system compromise have justifiable concerns for diseases that can be transmitted by public exposure. My guidance is that persons who have been advised that it is unsafe for them to be in public places (like those noted above) may be justified in remaining home on Sunday.

Most of our communities are open to regular church participation now. However, pastors/administrators have been instructed to remain informed about any residual restrictions in effect by local health authorities. We acknowledge that this viral disease has been treacherous and could resurge. For that reason, we will need to remain vigilant and flexible to reinstate restrictions if necessary. The pandemic has been traumatic for many. There will be those that through their personal experience remain very apprehensive. The pastor may elect to move more slowly in restoring activities if they identify a high number of traumatized persons among the faithful who will be present at their celebrations. The faithful should be made to feel comfortable to wear a mask if they choose.

Please be assured of my prayers for your health and safety. I ask for God's blessing on all and the intercession of our patron Saints as we work to restore the activities and ministry of the church in the Diocese of Gallup.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James Seán Wall".

The Most Rev. James Seán Wall
Bishop of Gallup