



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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Vicar General
and Moderator of the Curia

May 29, 2020

Dear County Executive Elrich:

Today I am writing on behalf of the Archdiocese of Washington to ask for your support in allowing members of our community to attend worship services in Montgomery County under the next phase of Montgomery County's re-opening plan, which was outlined in your briefing yesterday afternoon. As you may know, the Archdiocese of Washington participated in a diverse working group of faith leaders who advised Governor Hogan on how to safely resume public religious worship. Consistent with the recommendations of the faith community, the Governor's re-opening plan allows for indoor religious services to resume with the number of worshippers in attendance at any one service to be capped at 50% of building capacity. These measures are set forth in the Governor's Executive Order No. 20-05-27-01.

We ask that the County provide for members of our community to attend indoor services at 50% capacity, consistent with the Governor's Executive Order. This practice has been implemented throughout most of the counties in the State, including the three Archdiocesan counties located in Southern Maryland, as well as in the Commonwealth of Virginia. We also note that grocery stores, hotels, and other spaces where the public congregates are not currently limited to a specific number of people or restricted by any building capacity limitations under Montgomery County's re-opening plans.

The Archdiocese of Washington has prepared detailed written guidelines for the resumption of public Mass at its parishes, including those in Montgomery County. In preparing these guidelines, we have worked collaboratively with health experts and public agencies to ensure that indoor and outdoor religious services are conducted in a safe and orderly manner, utilizing safeguards and best practices that are consistent with the applicable guidelines for social distancing and public safety. These plans have been shared with each of our parishes, along with other information to communicate the new procedures with our parishioners. We have attached a copy of these guidelines to this submission. We have also asked each parish to address any additional logistical concerns that may be specific to their individual location and to make it clear that those who feel uncomfortable or are at higher risk should continue to stay home and access remote worship resources.

In addition, we appreciate your public assurances yesterday that outdoor religious services may resume in Montgomery County as of Monday morning, June 1, 2020, at 6:00 a.m. However, the proposed Montgomery County Executive Order 070-20, published this morning, appears to restrict outdoor gatherings to “drive-in” services where worshippers must remain in their vehicles and have no interaction with clergy. We are concerned that this measure would seem to prohibit Catholics from celebrating Mass or receiving Holy Communion. Such an approach would unfairly single out Catholic churches for disparate treatment, both in relation to other faith groups and other allowed outdoor activities (such as outdoor dining, camps, and recreational activities). We respectfully ask that you clarify the order and consider the approach proposed in Executive Order 070-020.

The Archdiocese of Washington respectfully requests that Montgomery County adopt the resumption of indoor religious services at 50% building capacity, as set forth in the Governor’s Order, as well as allowing for outdoor religious services to proceed in a manner that accommodates the celebration of Catholic Masses, effective June 1, 2020. Should you wish to discuss these recommendations or the procedures we are prepared to implement in our churches, please contact our Chancellor and General Counsel, Kim Fiorentino, reachable at fiorentinok@adw.org or 301-853-4521.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request. Please know of our continued prayers for you and for all of the residents of Montgomery County.

Sincerely in Christ,



Reverend Daniel B. Carson
Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia
Archdiocese of Washington

The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850