Dear Diocesan Family,

Peace be with you! A year ago today, I had two phone calls from Washington, DC on my caller ID after finishing daily Mass. Upon returning the call, I learned that I had been named by Pope Francis as the Eleventh Bishop of Syracuse. I was sworn to secrecy until the announcement day of June 4th, after which began a two-month process before my Ordination and Installation as your new Bishop. I learned quickly that there were many details to be tended to and it would require a lot of hard work from so many people to whom I will always be grateful. One of the biggest problems was how we are going to get everyone invited to fit into the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Yet, it was accomplished and everything was so beautiful!

Ten months later, we are faced with a similar situation not just with the diocesan cathedral, but with all our parish churches. How can we safely assemble for public worship in the midst of a pandemic that has killed over 100,000 people just in the United States? As you might imagine, I have received many emails and letters with a gamut of advice. Some suggest to me to disregard all the rhetoric surrounding COVID-19, while others beg me to not open our churches to public worship until it is safer to gather in larger crowds. All are well intentioned and I take what has been written to me seriously, as well as, the consultations that have occurred on the local, state, and national levels with civil and religious leaders, along with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and both the American and Catholic Medical Associations (AMA/CMA).

Last Friday, May 22nd, the Diocese issued instructions and requirements for the resumption of public worship in our parishes. Parish leaders are expected to read and provide me with a plan of action for the resumption of public worship before receiving permission to begin. This is to ensure that all the safety measures are in place. Clergy and lay leaders are aware that following the current Executive Order and the NYS Department of Health Interim Guidance for Religious and Funeral Services, only ten (10) persons are allowed to join in public meeting or 50% of a parking lot capacity may be used. I have been in discussion with local civil authorities to see if a more suitable number for the size of our churches might be found while maintaining social distancing requirements.

Nonetheless, since public worship is now permitted, I have decided to allow parishes that are ready and able to have public Masses this coming weekend, May 30 & 31, the Solemnity of Pentecost - while fully complying with both our diocesan protocols and current civil regulations. It is important to note that every parish may not be ready for public worship this weekend and may need to delay the resumption of public Masses even until sometime later in June because of the ability to meet occupancy and safety standards. I have encouraged Daily Mass to begin in our parishes on Monday, June 1st. However, again, this availability will be based on a parish’s ability to comply with diocesan protocols and state mandates.

Faith • Hope • Charity
The diocese will still be providing the livestreaming of Daily Mass from the Cathedral, as well as, the televised Sunday Mass. As a favor, I would ask the Faithful of the Diocese to be sensitive to the capacity of a neighboring parish to handle visitors, if your parish is not having public worship. It might be better to give them a call to see if they can accommodate your desire to attend Mass. Just like there has always been the concern of not overwhelming the local health care system during the pandemic, the same principle should be applied to our parishes and not overwhelming our clergy or our neighbors.

It is also important that parishioners be patient and understanding during this unsettled time. You may not be able to go to Sunday Mass every Sunday if people have to take turns because of the number allowed in a building or the capacity of a parking lot, or it might mean having to go to a Weekday Mass instead. Most likely, you will have to register in some manner so that a parish can control the occupancy number in a church or a parking lot, as well as track attendance in the unfortunate case a parishioner becomes ill with the coronavirus. **Masks must be worn at Mass** and I strongly urge that Holy Communion be taken in the hand to protect the Minister of Holy Communion. There is nothing irreverent about Communion in the Hand as long as it done in the proper manner of making a throne for Christ and not taking it like a piece of candy. The great St. Charles Borromeo, who became the Archbishop of Milan at age 27, and whose pastoral ministry and writings I admire greatly, instituted this practice in his diocese when northern Europe was battling the plague in 1576-1578.

While I am excited about the re-opening of our parishes for public worship, I am still very concerned that we mix our expression of faith with prudential sense on how we proceed in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Please make yourself familiar with the instructions and protocols found on our diocesan website, [www.syrdio.org](http://www.syrdio.org) under “Re-opening of Churches.” Again, all social distancing guidelines need to be followed at all times and face masks must be worn in church. Socializing with others before or after Mass will not be permitted for the safety of all present. If you are sick or are in the vulnerable category for catching COVID-19, it is necessary for you to stay home and join in Sunday Mass via your television or computer. It is important to remember that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended and that those who attend Mass do so on their own volition.

I have to admit a year ago when I said, “Yes” to the nuncio about accepting this assignment, I knew there was going to be a learning curve. Yet, even then, I knew also that I would not want because ultimately it is the Lord who is our Shepherd. Well, without a doubt, I have dealt with things I have never dreamed of, but at the same time I have felt the Lord’s guiding presence all the way. And so, as we prepare for the great feast of Pentecost, I ask the Lord to continue to send us His Spirit so that we might continue to renew the face of the earth and enkindle within it the fire of His Love.

Be assured of my continued prayers for you and your loved ones. Stay well!

In the Name of Jesus,

[Signature]

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse