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April 29, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings in the Risen Lord. In celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we rejoice in the gift of new life that God bestows on us every day. As well, with the good news that more of us are being vaccinated – and the numbers of those infected with Covid-19 remain relatively low in our diocese at this point – we thank God that we are in a position to celebrate Mass with fewer restrictions.

Truly, it has been a very difficult and challenging year. It is heartbreaking to note the number of people who have died or who have been sickened by the virus. While we cannot let our guard down completely, there is reason for hope. We can safely say that, because of the efforts of us all to adhere to the protocols put in place, we have been able to mitigate outbreaks of the virus at our parishes and schools. The attention we all put on wearing masks, maintaining social distance, and proper personal hygiene appears to be paying off.

The Church exists to evangelize, and we do that by sharing the Gospel and worshipping our God together in the liturgy. Following the Lord's example, we embrace love and charity in all things. Our pro-life values move us to care for and protect the vulnerable, and so it will be necessary to maintain some safety measures for the long term.

Some of the protocols will remain in place for the entire diocese, while I am leaving it up to the individual pastors to adapt various regulations upon the particular circumstances of their parish.

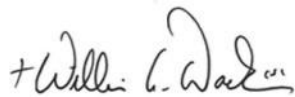
- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation continues for now. However I intend to make changes to this dispensation soon, and I will inform you all when those changes will begin. This is a good time to work on safely getting more people into our churches, so that when the dispensation is lifted all the baptized will be able to celebrate Mass in person again.
- The Precious Blood will not be available to the congregation yet. I look forward to the day when that will be offered again. Remember that the consecrated sacred Host contains the fullness of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. I reiterate what I wrote a year ago: "Communicants are strongly urged to receive the Host in the hands as an act of charitable consideration for the health of fellow parishioners." However, if the pastor of the parish is amenable, reception of the Eucharist on the tongue is again an option.

- Keeping safety and good hygiene practices in mind, you may very well see the return of altar servers, lay ministers of the Word and the Eucharist, a collection taken up, holy water in the fonts, and an Offertory procession.
- If there is to be a Sign of Peace at Mass, please be respectful of your neighbors and do not shake their hands or make contact with them. A simple bow or a wave is sufficient.
- I continue to urge people to wear masks in our churches, our schools, in parish buildings, and whenever indoors around others, as that seems to be the best way to prevent the spread of this disease. I would also ask that we do not judge anyone either for wearing a mask or for not wearing a mask. Again, Christian charity and love should win out.
- Please be patient, especially when entering and departing church, allowing the congregation to gather and disperse in a safe manner.

In all things, please follow the directions of your parish. Our priests have been heroic in their efforts to implement the protocols I put in place in order to protect people and to make it possible for us to worship in person during this extraordinary time. The need to be cautious continues, and we will not be able to do everything all at once.

We are blessed to be able to celebrate Mass daily - and hundreds of times on the weekends. We never stopped celebrating Masses, nor will we stop until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. Going forward, let us be attentive to the needs of others while at the same time making it possible for more and more people to know, love, and serve the Lord in our parishes and schools.

In Christ's Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "+ William A. Wack, CSC". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Most Reverend William A. Wack, CSC
Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee