January 30, 2021

Dear Monsignors, Fathers, and Deacons,

I am writing to make you aware of upcoming adjustments to our regathering policies. As we continue to live in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic there are many signs of hope on the horizon, including a steady decline of positive cases and hospitalizations, an almost non-existent flu season, and the increased availability of the COVID vaccines. Even as conditions improve, we remember that we have not yet emerged from the pandemic, and continued vigilance and precautions are important.

With these considerations in mind, as of February 2, 2021, the Feast of the Presentation, I am lifting the suspension on social gatherings, and resuming Phase III of the regathering protocols. In doing so, I commend to you as pastors and clergy your responsibility to discern whether to host parish meetings of various kinds, including social gatherings, with a maximum attendance cap of 100 people. You also retain discretion to set a smaller maximum attendance cap—in part based on the size of the space where respective meetings take place and your own sense of whether people both from within and outside the parish will abide by attendance limits.

You are prudent to weigh how any proposed social gathering bears more directly on the evangelical mission and enhances the spiritual communion of the parish. Again: while social gatherings are permitted, they are not required. A discernment guide is posted on our website [here](#). Permission granted here presumes mitigation efforts are being adhered to which include proper social distancing, sanitation, and the use of masks. In events involving food and drink, masks are required while entering/exiting the room but obviously not while eating and drinking. These social guidelines apply as well for fish fries, should your parish elect to not only permit carryout but on site dining.

**PLEASE NOTE WELL:** I hereby also extend the mask requirement for Mass and all sacramental and liturgical celebrations, according to the conditions communicated...
November 11-12, 2020, beyond February 2, 2021. The mask requirement will remain in place through Divine Mercy Sunday, April 11, 2021, at which time it will again be reconsidered. This decision corresponds to the recommendations of public health experts within the local medical community.

I believe these decisions prioritize our ability to continue to worship God as Christ’s Body, and best serve the common good at this moment of the pandemic. I will be sharing these decisions with the public on our diocesan webpage, and I ask that you also help communicate and support these decisions in your parish. As before, your advocacy, pastoral sensitivity, and willingness to offer correction when necessary will directly shape the reception of these policies. I know that this is not an easy time for any of us, and especially at this stage of the pandemic, COVID fatigue can set in. While many of our people are hurting and flagging in patience and charity, including perhaps ourselves, let us continue to be agents of unity, peace, and hope.

As always, I am grateful for all the ways, visible and hidden, that you serve and guide the people of our Des Moines Diocese. May we continue to lift one another up in prayer and solidarity in the Spirit.

Faithfully in Christ,

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