St Paul teaches that Christians are subject to the civil authorities. As such, we are bound to follow the directives of our state government, which is influenced by directives and advice from the federal government, national healthcare advisories and its own experts.

Let us remember that the strictures imposed by the civil authorities are intended to slow the rate of infection so as to not overwhelm the healthcare system. We cannot eradicate the threat of infection unless a vaccine is developed, which might happen in 2021, or later, or not at all. In the meantime, we are commanded to love and care for our neighbor; hence, we are committed to mitigating the chance of infection. That said, of course, we live in a fallen world, and this virus and all other diseases, known and unknown, are facts in that world.

As a church, we must cultivate and exercise the virtues of both courage and prudence. The COVID virus is dangerous to some, an irritation to more, and of no consequence to many. How do we both prudentially protect the safety of the most vulnerable members of the Body of Christ and move courageously to rebuild our shattered worship and sacramental life?

In view of our scripturally-enjoined obligation to obey the lawfully-constituted civil authority except in the case of manifest injustice, it seems appropriate to link our own prudent steps toward resumption of public worship to the various phases of the reopening plan published by the Governor of Illinois (Restore Illinois). At the time of this message, all geographic areas of the Diocese of Springfield fully meet the criteria for Phase 3 (Recovery). Gatherings of up to ten people are allowed (even though, as of the date of this announcement, the Governor has not officially declared Phase 3, his earlier statement did allow religious gatherings), though personal distancing and face coverings remain the norm. It is impossible to even estimate when we will reach Phase 4 (Revitalization), at which schools and restaurants will reopen, with gatherings of up to fifty people permitted (which would accommodate average Sunday attendance in all but a handful of our Eucharistic Communities), though still with distancing and masks. Still less is it possible to predict when we might reach Phase 5 (Illinois Restored): full reopening. This will require either the development of an effective and widely-available vaccine, or “herd immunity.” The only estimates seem to place this benchmark at least a year away, and quite possibly longer.
Provided that official notice is given, as expected, that we are in Phase 3, public assembly for worship in the Diocese of Springfield, at regular times, is now permitted as of Pentecost, May 31. However, any one celebration must be limited to a total of ten people, all abiding by restrictions that are detailed below. Local clergy and lay leaders are responsible for devising a way of determining which nine individuals, in addition to the priest or other leader, are invited and permitted to attend. In about three instances, this would encompass the entire number of “regulars.” In most, however, some other system must be implemented. A few others may be able to accommodate their whole usual congregation by having more than one service. I trust the leaders in each locale to work out these details.

Here are the parameters which I am directing that everyone observe as we put an initial toe into the water of reopening. Once again, as was the case in my pastoral letter of March 17, there are three levels of strictness: That which I direct expect to be followed, as a matter of canonical obedience, by the clergy. That which I offer as counsel strongly urge to be implemented, and personally hope will be implemented, but I leave the final decision to local leaders, with no onus of obedience. That which I commend to the diocese I hope will be given serious and prudent consideration, but with no concrete expectations beyond that.

**Direction**

1.0 All in attendance must wear face coverings that mask both nose and mouth. The celebrant/officiant is exempt in order to speak the necessary portions of the service, and to preach. Those who read lessons (including the deacon at the gospel) or lead the Prayers of the People are exempt while performing those duties. Even so, care must be given to the distance between someone speaking at a level typical of public reading and preaching and members of the congregation. The six-foot standard is likely not adequate in this case.

1.01 The cleric or layperson in charge must make multiple good-faith efforts to remind parishioners who are in high-risk categories due to age or potential comorbidities to seriously lay to heart whether they ought to absent themselves from public worship altogether until
the extraordinary danger has passed. That said, the church must respect the ability of competent adults to make such decisions on their own behalf.

1.02 Those who already live under the same roof may sit together. Otherwise, everyone must maintain a personal distance of at least six feet.

1.03 At the Eucharist, the celebrant and anyone else who will touch the elements or altar vessels must wash his or her hands with soap and water for a full twenty seconds immediately prior to the Offertory and Great Thanksgiving.

1.04 At the Eucharist, excessive care must be taken by the celebrant not to exhale or speak directly toward the elements. The bread must be covered by an extra corporal, and the chalice by a pall, even during the Words of Institution. If they are uncovered for the purpose of elevation, the celebrant must remain silent while doing so, and then promptly replace the covers.

1.05 There is enough debate in the scientific community as to whether singing increases the chances of transmission to warrant caution until more clarity emerges. Therefore, all services must be said, with no choir, and no congregational singing or chanting.

1.06 There must be no passing of the offering plate.

1.07 The minimum personal distance must be maintained at the sharing of the Peace. Any combination of making eye contact, bowing, and various hand gestures will have to suffice for a good while.

1.08 While the celebrant must self-communicate from the chalice, in this extraordinary season, I will permit the clergy to opt for communion of the people via the consecrated bread only (yes, in violation of the rubric).

1.09 If the chalice is offered to the people, neither any form of intinction nor communion on the tongue is permitted.
1.10 There must be no coffee hour, Sunday School, child care or other indoor post-liturgical gathering. A gathering in the garden or parking lot, with masks and physical distancing, is permitted.

1.11 Facilities for hand-washing must be readily available to all attendees.

1.12 If a community opts for having more than one Sunday celebration, thought must be given to the need for disinfecting between services. Before every use of a church worship space, care should be taken to appropriate disinfect surfaces with which members of the congregation are likely to have contact. These might include the tops and ends of pews, the communion rail, door knobs/handles, and light switches.

Counsel

2.00 When feasible, outdoor worship should be encouraged. Please note, however, that, for the time being, the cap on attendees remains at ten, and masks are still required, even when outdoors.

2.01 An offering plate should be placed in an announced location, and attendees encouraged to place their gifts in it as they arrive, or at some other convenient time.

2.02 If it is desirable to present the monetary offerings at the altar, the plate should be brought forward by a person wearing latex gloves that were put on just prior, and are disposed of immediately after use.

2.03 When possible, the use of service bulletins or leaflets, or the use of the same Prayer Book in close temporal proximity, should be avoided. When used, they should be placed in an appropriate location at least 48 hours earlier for attendees to pick up themselves. After the
liturgy, these materials should be removed/disposed of by someone wearing gloves. Consideration could be given to supplying service materials by email or download, to be printed at home. People might be encouraged to use their own Prayer Book or “adopt” one particular copy for their sole use during this season.

2.04 Greeters and ushers should continue to be “laid off” during this period, unless they are re-tasked with monitoring and encouraging safe behavior.

2.05 The practice of leaving the consecrated elements in a neutral location and inviting people to communicate themselves one-by-one is discouraged. It is salutary to maintain the principle that the sacrament is received, not taken. With enough care and attention on the part of both minister and communicant, hand-to-hand contact can be easily avoided.

2.06 The communion minister should wear a mask during the administration of the sacrament. Communicants may of course remove their mask to consume the sacrament, but should consider actually receiving the consecrated bread in the hand while masked, then stepping away to remove their mask and consume the sacrament.

2.07 Meetings of the Mission Leadership Team and other committees and working groups should still be held virtually as much as possible. The reason for this is to prevent prolonged sharing of the same indoor space; the element of time is what increases the possibility of infection.

2.08 Adequate and appropriate communication is very important. People should arrive knowing what is expected of them by way of compliance with these directives. Email, social media, and on-site signs and handouts are probably all part of this mix.

2.09 For purposes of a potential future need for contact tracing, the in-charge cleric or designated lay leader should keep a record of attendees, by name and date.

(Do remember that latex gloves are for single use only. Once they have touched something that is potentially contaminated, they must themselves be presumed to be contaminated. The frequent and thorough washing of hands is a more effective prophylactic against infection.)
3.0 To encourage appropriate personal distancing, it may be necessary to impede access to every other row of pews or chairs. It may also be advisable to place barriers of some sort in the middle of pews, moving individuals and family groups to either end. Other creative solutions are no doubt available.

3.1 The circumstances of each location will vary, but, when possible, the celebrant might stand back from the altar as much as possible during the Eucharistic Prayer (Great Thanksgiving through Fraction).

3.2 In order to obviate the necessity of disinfecting a potentially contaminated communion rail, communities may wish to consider queuing up in the center aisle (maintaining distance) and receive communion in the hand while standing.

As utterly bizarre as it seems for me to write and you to read something like this, we must cease baptizing either infants or adults until we figure out procedures that are workable and safe. Baptism under emergency circumstances, when death appears imminent, may take place.

I expect to gently resume my Sunday visitation schedule on an ad hoc basis, in consultation with local leaders (cognizant, of course, that, in order to keep the total under ten, my presence effectively “bumps” one of the baptized faithful). For the time being, however, I will decline to administer confirmation—once again, until we can take wider counsel, and find a way of doing it with reasonable safety.
These measures will doubtless be revised multiple times, and frequently, before things settle down. Canon Evans and I are monitoring announcements from the Roman Catholic dioceses in Illinois, and taking counsel as to the appropriateness of applying some of what they have discerned to our context. Consideration of the size of buildings and concepts like “percentage of capacity” will doubtless come into play. We will also try to find a way to make music safely as soon as possible.

I ask your patience and goodwill as we try to learn to fly this plane while building it!

Faithfully in Christ,

+Daniel Springfield

Feast of St Dunstan, 2020