



Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We think deeply about our Church these days. The distancing and the sheltering (or lack of it) raise thoughts about the Church as an institution. Let's remind ourselves that we did not make the institution, but that the Holy Spirit made and remakes it, the Church.

Austen Ivereigh sent Pope Francis some questions which he responded to in late March. The Pope reminds his interviewer that the pandemic is not the sole source of disorder. In the life of the Church, the Holy Spirit provokes disorder by a rich scattering of charisms, and then out of that disorder orchestrates a harmony. In these days, we should wonder what the Spirit is trying to shake out, to prune away, so that in days to come we can first perceive, then act upon those divine impulses. The same Spirit prompts us to wonder who God wants us to be, so that we can wonder what our Church's mission requires of us. These sentiments should shape our plans for re-emerging from the disruption and suffering during this pandemic.

And plan we must, both for the sake of order as well as charity. Each day brings new information, further consultation and more recommendations. As I mentioned in my last letter, I know people are hungry to get back into church. The decisions that I will make about Masses and sacraments are complex and I am thankful for your continued patience. I'm regularly consulting with the Indiana Catholic bishops, attending to federal and local state (Indiana) pronouncements, and weighing the advice of healthcare officials.

Our main concern remains the pastoral care for souls in our diocese. After consultation, we have decided to postpone our original Uniting in Heart clergy transfer date that was scheduled for June 29, 2020. We don't know what the next few weeks will bring but I would like to try to provide an opportunity for your

parish families to see one another again, to celebrate the sacraments together and to have a proper send-off before our changes. With this in mind, Wednesday, August 19, 2020 will be the 'moving day.' Our retiring pastors have agreed to keep working until then. After this, they will be able to help periodically with supply work, while not assuming an official or unofficial status as an adjunct to any single pastorate.

You might ask—"What if we encounter another surge in the COVID-19 infection rate and numbers as predicted for mid-August or September? Is the moving date firm?" Educated forecasts show that there will be another surge, we just don't know when. For planning purposes, August 19, 2020 has to be a firm date. Information about home sales indicates that people can and do move in the present environment.

There are several reasons why it will be advisable to wait a bit longer than June 29, 2020, and there are reasons why we cannot further extend the time before assignment changes.

1. I understand longing each of you has to see your pastor and priests to say goodbye before the move. As the lockdown continues, we aren't quite sure that we will be able to assemble in groups at the end of June. And for right now, assembling in any sizable groups to do any advance planning or facilities preparation is problematic. So, some delay is warranted.
2. I also acknowledge that our priests have the desire to celebrate the sacraments with the people they have been journeying with over the past weeks and months. While realizing limitations may fluctuate by the week or month, I hope this delay will allow enough time for the clergy to celebrate First Holy Communion, Baptisms, Confirmations, etc. with their parishioners.
3. Our retiring priests have agreed to stay at their posts for a while longer but it's important to remember, they are staying on as a favor to us, and we don't want to abuse the favor. I also do not want to wear them out. Most want to help out at parishes from time to time – they might be available for years if we don't wear them out now.

4. Where parish schools are concerned, an August 19 move date allows present pastors to greet the school students on their (hoped for) return to classroom learning for the 2020-2021 school year (a blessing since they were not given the opportunity for a proper goodbye when the lockdown began). The longer we wait, the more burdensome the transition becomes between unfamiliar priests and school staff.

5. There have been many suggestions about the timing of moves and about the best week, month, or year. To be practical, that conversation cannot proceed indefinitely. And it is not a matter of one person being right and other wrong, it's about the need for somebody to make a decision. That decision brings a bit of certainty into a historical moment where things actually are in constant motion. Waiting and delay are not free of costs—there is a cost in personnel, deferred maintenance, or in streaming resources into efforts that have little to do with the long-term vitality of the church of Lafayette-in-Indiana.

In the meantime, we have decided that ordinations will be moved to Saturday, August 1st at the Cathedral. The reason for this is two-fold; I want the men to be able to share this momentous occasion with their families and friends and current restrictions would limit our congregation (assembly) size. I also want our newly ordained to be able to go into ministry following their ordination and not have to shelter-in-place until current restrictions have let up. I realize that this short-circuits the summer ministry for transitional deacons, but it is a difficult time. One of our senior men reminded me of the abbreviated formation some men experienced during the Second World Wars [sic].

State recommendations about groups no larger than ten persons will continue to apply to Masses, infant baptisms, weddings and funerals. Social distancing remains a requirement of such gatherings, in addition to any sanitizing that needs to happen before and after a gathering. Where the small group gathering is not a chosen option, sacraments will be performed when re-opening is prudently possible (infant baptisms, weddings, funerals or Memorial Masses).

Additionally, I have asked a pastor to empanel seasoned pastors and a health professional to be a taskforce that will review guidelines for our parishes as we begin to 're-open'.

Please know that all of you remain in my prayers and your health and wellbeing is of utmost importance. I ask that each of you continue to pray for an end to this pandemic and that the Blessed Mother sustain us in our ministry. This Friday, May 1st, there will be a national re consecration to Mary, Mother of God. We seek her intercession and the kind attentions of Our Lord, Jesus.

In Christ's peace,

Most Reverend Timothy Doherty
Bishop of Lafayette-in-Indiana