

MOST REVEREND
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UPDATING THE DIOCESE OF BILOXI'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

To the Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Biloxi:

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. By our in-person participation in the Mass, we fulfill Christ's commandment to "Do this in memory of me." At Mass, we not only gather around the table of the Last Supper, we also mysteriously join in the heavenly supper of the Lamb. Participation in Holy Mass is central and indispensable to the believer, and reception of Holy Eucharist is our "medicine of immortality." While online streaming of Mass has been immeasurably helpful over the course of the pandemic, it can never replace the assembly of the faithful.

On March 17 of last year, with the advice of medical professionals, I responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a number of directives and a dispensation for the faithful from the Church's Mass participation obligation. After the initial 30 days of the dispensation, it was renewed until further notice.

Having consulted the Presbyteral Council on February 11, 2021, it seems opportune that the *general dispensation* from Mass participation be allowed to expire, although in a phased manner.

Therefore, beginning with the Saturday Vigil for Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, March 27, 2021, the general dispensation from the obligation of in-person participation in the celebration of Holy Mass will expire.

That said, I hereby extend a *particular dispensation* from the obligation to personally participate in the celebration of Mass for the following:

- those who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to an underlying health condition and who have not yet been vaccinated, and
- those 60 years and older who have not yet been vaccinated.

On a case-by-case basis, parishioners who are particularly concerned about their own or a family member's vulnerability may approach Pastors for a one-month dispensation, renewable as the Pastor determines appropriate.

I encourage all the faithful to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as the opportunity becomes available.

Masks, handwashing, and social distancing are still to be practiced in parishes.

Please be assured of my prayers and a remembrance in my daily private Masses. Let us remember in prayer those who have died, those who are sick, and all who are anxious and hurting at this time.

Given at the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Biloxi on February 18, A.D. 2021.

+ Louis Kihneman

Most Reverend Louis F. Kihneman

Bishop of Biloxi