



ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

Office of the Archbishop

May 18, 2020

Dear parishioners,

As we reopen our churches for the celebration of the Mass and Sacraments with the People of God present and actively participating, we recognize that we cannot eliminate the very possible risk of infection from the novel corona virus or COVID-19. However, your parish priests and I are committed to mitigating the risk as much as possible. We reopen because we believe as Church that there are no substitutes for the reception of the sacraments and our first priority is to be the sign of hope and instrument of the salvation of the entire human race.”

On Tuesday, May 26, parishes will resume celebrating daily Masses. (May 18 in Monroe County). However, social distancing will be required with approximately 6 feet separation between persons (except for family members from same household); worshippers are asked to wear a face mask and to keep it on during Mass, removing it only to receive Holy Communion. Hymnals, missalettes, holy water will be removed from the church; and the church and its facilities will be sanitized between services. Hand sanitizers are available at church entrances. In entering or leaving the church, and in approaching the altar to receive Holy Communion please maintain proper social distance. These arrangements will take some time getting used to and so you are asked to pay attention to ushers or others who may be directing. After Mass please do not congregate in the church or outside but make your way home.

During Mass, please do not hold hands (for example, during the praying of the Lord’s Prayer), or exchange the Sign of Peace. While preaching or at the altar the celebrant will not use a face mask, but he and other ministers will when they distribute Holy Communion. (If anyone disagrees about the necessity of wearing a face mask; I would ask that person to wear it anyway – out of respect for and charity towards their fellow parishioners.)

Social distancing will reduce the numbers of faithful that can be accommodated - perhaps only 25-30% of your church’s usual occupancy. Your parish priests – with input from their pastoral councils – will plan appropriately – perhaps by adding Masses to the schedule if necessary or setting up some type of “reservation system” to assure that everyone who wishes to attend can do so.

The dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass on Sunday continues indefinitely. Good judgment and reason should guide your decision as to when you should resume coming to Sunday Mass.

If you are sick or have flu like symptoms, stay home. If you are frail because of age or are vulnerable because of an underlying condition, or you are a caretaker of someone who is, it might be reasonable for you to stay home. If you are fearful, stay home.

These “home bound” parishioners should contact the parish rectory and arrange for the Sacraments to be brought to them.

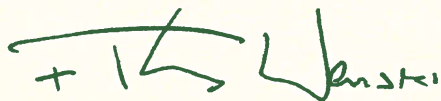
We do not live in a risk-free world – we never have. There is a certain amount of risk we assume when we cross a street, or when we get in our cars to go to work or even to the corner store. We can never eliminate risk completely, but prudence helps us to mitigate risk whenever and wherever possible. So, when we cross a street, we go to a crosswalk and look both ways before crossing; when we get into our car, we make sure that it is operating safely, that the brakes work, etc. and when we make a turn we use our turn signals.

The corona virus, COVID-19, has introduced new risks into our lives – and until a vaccine is widely available, we will be unable to eliminate completely the risks, but we must prudently try to mitigate those risks wherever and whenever possible. For this reason, the entire world put itself into “lock down”, practicing social distance, washing hands frequently, and pretty much staying at home as much as possible. The “lock down” succeeded in as much as the spread of this very contagious virus was flattened and our hospitals were not overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases. Nevertheless, a high price was paid by all – for all were affected even if not all were infected. Our lives were upended: schools closed, public gatherings limited, millions of jobs lost – and, to be sure despite these measures, many thousands fell sick and too many of our loved ones died.

In the Archdiocese of Miami, we suspended Masses with congregations present beginning March 16. However, we never “closed”: our parish offices remained open, our schools, our Catholic Charities, our Catholic Health Services, our Pastoral Center all continued their operations. Priests continued making sick calls, hearing confession, and offering Mass daily. Through livestreaming of Masses, Bible studies and many other activities your priests strove to remain present to you, their parishioners. And while they could not celebrate Masses in church with you these past many weeks, they never failed in offering you, the people of God, their most “essential service” of their prayers.

Our civic authorities throughout the US and the world are slowly “unlocking” the various jurisdictions under their control even while scientists and medical professionals continue to urge caution. The novel corona virus is still among us – as is the risk of contagion. As we move to reopen, prudence – the ability to govern and discipline ourselves by the use of reason – must govern our actions. There is no substitute for good judgment.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "T. Wenski". The signature is stylized and includes a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Reverend Thomas Wenski
Archbishop of Miami