



## DIOCESE OF GALLUP

PO Box 1338  
Gallup, New Mexico 87305

May 15, 2020

Memorial of Saint Isidore the Farmer

Dear Members of the Faithful and Clergy of the Diocese of Gallup,

Greetings of the Easter Season. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

During the penitential time of Lent, we miss the exuberance of saying and singing “alleluia” but the restraint, like our fasting and abstinence, prepares us to celebrate more joyously the Easter Season. In many ways the current restrictions in our physical activity and access to the Sacraments seems similar and it increases our desire to worship and receive the Sacraments in the freedom that we had enjoyed before. It is good that we desire these things. This weekend we celebrate the 6th Sunday of Easter and draw closer to the feasts that end the Easter Season, the Solemnities of the Ascension and Pentecost. This Sunday, Jesus speaks words of hope and comfort us when he says, “I will not leave you orphans”. Our Lord is repeating a theme we hear throughout the Sacred Scriptures. In Isaiah 41:10, God speaks His word of comfort to His people during a tumultuous time. He gives them hope through His prophet “Do not fear, I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand”. The final words of Our Lord before ascending to the right hand of the Father are “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

We are assured that even during this great struggle and deprivation, we can rest assured that Jesus remains with us to comfort and strengthen us in his apostolic Church. We must in prayer bring ourselves into that spiritual unity for which Christ prayed so ardently before he went to suffer and die for us. We join ourselves with all the faithful, in our world and the saints that have preceded us, and we rest in the assurance that Jesus is with us always.

We are anxiously waiting to return to normal activity in the Church, to our customary spiritual practices and to reception of Holy Communion. Unfortunately, the reality of the current situation with the coronavirus does not permit a relaxation of the protective measures currently in place. After consultation with experts and a thorough review of information from many sources, I’ve concluded that most of the territory of the Diocese of Gallup is still severely afflicted by this deadly pestilence. Sadly, we have not achieved enough control of the spread of the virus. In our diocese there are still too many deaths and ICU hospitalizations to justify reducing our present efforts to control the spread of the virus.

As examples of the local disease prevalence, 1 out of every 43 persons in McKinley County has tested positive which approaches the rate of Newark, New Jersey, that is considered one of the most impacted sites in the United States. In the Navajo County of Arizona 1 out of every 96 persons tested positive and in Apache County it is 1 out of 83 persons. That compares to the whole State of Arizona which has only 1 in 574 persons affected. It is clear that these counties which make up the majority of the Diocese of Gallup are quite different than the surrounding areas. Our response must be tailored to the disease, our people and their

circumstances. We do recognize the disparity even within the Diocese of Gallup. For example, Catron County has only recorded two cases, but their population is only 3,725 people.

We are encouraged by some of the information that many parts of both New Mexico and Arizona appear to be improving. We rejoice for their good fortune and we know that many of those places were restricted for some time before the region of our Diocese since the disease struck there earlier. Please know that we are very anxious to reduce restrictions, but at the appropriate time. Notice of any change will be given well in advance. We will not be able to return to “business as usual” immediately, even when relaxation comes and maybe not for a long time. A staged, progressive return of church activity is anticipated. This will require planning on the part of each parish based on guidance from the Diocese. It will include at least all the following considerations necessitated by restraints on numbers of persons present in one place, physical safe distances, and personnel resources.

- Number that can safely gather in one place
- Capacity of the church
- Seating configuration
- Doors, access and flow of persons
- Cleaning between Masses and other events
- Ventilation
- Crowd management
- Reservations management (if needed)
- Dissemination of information on available options to the faithful

As an act of charity, for the well-being of others, please continue the safe practices we have begun to ensure the safety of others and yourselves. Our prayers continue for the return to full health of our brothers and sisters afflicted by this disease and an end to the pandemic, so everyone may return to their former ways of life.

All previous directives from the Diocese regarding restraints due to the COVID-19 disease remain in effect as previously published and are briefly restated below:

No gathering of any type over 5 persons in New Mexico or 10 persons in Arizona  
Churches may be open for private devotion with limited numbers of persons  
Sacrament of Reconciliation should be liberally available in modified a setting  
Priests will say Mass in private daily for the needs of the faithful  
Funerals permitted with limited number of persons  
Weddings permitted with limited numbers of participants  
Face covering requested for all public interactions  
Physical safe distance maintained at greater than 6 feet between persons/families  
Faithful are dispensed from attending Sunday Mass but strongly encouraged to participate via electronic media

Our current directives will remain in effect indefinitely. If there are any changes to the directives, they will be promptly published on the Diocesan Webpage and the various social media platforms. Parishes are encouraged to post current directives as well. The cooperation and assistance of all the faithful, laity and clergy, is greatly appreciated as we move forward in solidarity, not simply for our own interests, but for the well-being of all. Your prayers are greatly appreciated for the leadership of diocese, that they may wisely discern the best courses of action as we look forward to a much brighter future. Thank you.

*Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.*  
Galatians 6:9 (Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition)

***Lord, we pray for the patience and the wisdom to do what is correct and just for our Church. We trust in your love in all circumstances. Lead us to unselfish service for the benefit of others, especially the poor and those struck with hardship at this time. Grant us your peace and may we do your will. +***

St. Isidore pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+James Sean Wall  
Bishop of Gallup