



DIOCESE OF GALLUP

PO Box 1338

Gallup, New Mexico 87305

June 3, 2020

Memorial of St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, Martyrs

Dear Pastor, Parish Administrator, Parish Leader;

Greetings as we begin Ordinary Time in circumstances that are anything but “ordinary.” This memorandum addresses questions about the resumption of church functions involving church offices, administrative activity and employees. Certainly, it is appropriate to consider restoration of church office functions in support of a return to celebrating Mass with assembly. However, the situation dictates something that is far different than “business as usual.”

The civil authorities in both states recognize the need for a return of administrative activity to support our church functions. However, both strongly advise restraint and adherence to practices that will continue to prevent spread of the COVID-19 disease. (You may find links to their published guidance at the end of this document.) It is necessary for each parish or church entity to establish their own plan. The process must consider the physical property, the staff, and the demand for ministry services. Every place will be somewhat different, but the major considerations are the same. We have both a moral and legal responsibility to provide a reasonably safe workspace for our employees as well as those we serve. In the current situation the appropriate caution and activity for one employee might not be advisable for another due to factors that increase their personal risk to contract disease.

Principal considerations include;

- The schedule to restore activity at the rectory, church office, and other physical portions of the church property must be determined by the individual pastor, administrator or supervisor for each place. It must be based on a knowledge of the current risk of disease in their own community. Consultation with civil leaders and knowledgeable parishioners is highly encouraged. Know and follow the local guidelines for business activity set by State, Tribal and local authorities. (see references below)
- Current general guidance is that the number of persons in a room should be kept below 25% of capacity (usually referring to allowed numbers determined by Fire Code). However, safe physical distancing must still be maintained and usually following that directive will sufficiently limit the number that can be allowed in a room. This limitation does not refer to the aggregate number of the employees and visitors in the whole building, but rather to those gathered in a single contiguous space like a meeting room. (It does not apply to personnel scattered throughout a building in different offices.)
- Electronic meeting platforms should be utilized as possible. Avoid gathering for in-person meetings if on-line meetings are feasible instead. If an in-person meeting is necessary for group, conduct it in a large space where distancing can be observed.

- Increase ventilation of indoor rooms as possible. Consider arranging certain activities with the public, where feasible, in an outdoor setting since that further reduces disease transmission. (Safe physical distancing and masks are still needed.)
- Common areas like break rooms and reception areas need special management to keep the number of persons limited, encourage hand cleansing and more frequent cleaning.
- Certain employees who can work efficiently at home and do not normally interface with visitors for expected services should be encouraged to work from home. (Example: a bookkeeper)
- Use appropriate signage to manage flow of persons, restrict access, and to remind about safety precautions.
- Control numbers and spacing of persons, both staff and visitors in all area, but particularly where people tend to congregate. Adjust staff work locations, assignments or stagger work schedules.
- Enforce appointments to avoid too many visitors waiting to be served.
- Establish a good reception process for anyone from outside. Include instructions for cautions that must be exercised in the building for their safety and that of others. A temperature check with a touch-free thermometer is advised for each person. Persons with fevers should not enter.
- Employee screening or self-screening should be done daily. Best practice dictates a sign-in process for employees which asks if they have any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19 or have had any new exposure to someone who has the disease. A temperature check with a touch-free thermometer is advised. If that equipment is not available, the employees should be asked to take their temperature at home with a standard thermometer. No one with a temperature over 100.4 degrees (F) should be allowed to stay in the building.
- Follow instructions on use of masks/facial covering. (Mandatory in New Mexico for employees unless medically contraindicated and strongly encouraged in Arizona) Consider having masks to offer to visitors who present without one. Mask wear by employees may not be necessary for a person working in an individual office while they are alone, but a mask should be donned if someone else enters the room or they go out into common areas.
- Frequent cleaning of hands and the facility are very important. In a busy area, cleaning frequently-touched surfaces may be needed every 2-3 hours during the day. Establishing multiple sites for hand sanitizer encourages better habits.
- Employees who are at increased risk due to their age or health condition may need to delay returning to work or require some modification in their workspace or assigned duties, particularly as it involves interactions with visitors and other employees.
- Employees must be counseled that they should not come to work if they are showing any signs of symptoms of viral disease
- The need for laboratory testing for the Coronavirus is somewhat problematic and probably should not be required for employees to return to work unless there is known exposure. It is somewhat comforting if someone has tested negative for the infection, but it is not a guarantee that a person is disease-free due to a percentage of false

negative results. In addition, it is only a “snapshot” in time and has no bearing on whether they are going to get the infection from exposure later after the test. For that reason, it is important that we all behave as if we might have the disease in an occult, asymptomatic phase and take efforts to avoid infecting others.

- Employees must be strictly instructed that any exposure that they might have to a person with known COVID-19 disease requires a 14-day period of self-isolation to be certain that they do not have the disease and do not bring it to the workplace. Reassurance that their salary will be continued during such an absence will help prevent personnel from coming to work when sick because they fear financial harm.

This list is not exhaustive, but we hope it helps to start the process to plan and activate restoration of parish office and activity in our church buildings. The references below are strongly recommended for guidance and resources about safe processes, equipment and materials to support our church activity. Our resumed activity is not business as usual, but we can move forward, adapting to our new environment. It is possible to do our work with a reasonable margin of safety if we follow a . The staff at the Chancery will following these same guidelines and will be available to assist you to the best of our ability. Please contact us if you have questions. We pray for the success of your ministry to the faithful of our diocese.

Sincerely in Christ,

Dcn Randolph Copeland, MD
Chancellor, Diocese of Gallup

Approved by:

+ Bishop James Seán Wall

References for restoring activity in offices and buildings by State:

Arizona: The instructions from the Governor’s office were somewhat generalized. Leaders were advised to consult the advice that is readily available from the CDC, Department of Labor, OSHA and the Arizona Department of Health services. See the link below for additional information:

<https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/index.php#novel-coronavirus-community>

New Mexico: The NM Health Department produced an extensive document entitles All Together New Mexico, Safe COVID Practices. It addresses recommendations for many different types of businesses and activities. It is relatively succinct in spite of its length and tends to divide the information in each segment between directed requirements and best-practice recommendations. Page 29 deals exclusively with “Houses of Worship” but it refers to the sections on page 9 & 11 for more applicable directives about employees and sanitation of buildings that serve the public.

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/3f732e94-0164-424d-9ac6-a0ace27e70c8>