



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

240 E. ONONDAGA STREET, SYRACUSE, NY 13202-2608

November 27, 2020

Dear Collaborators in Pastoral Ministry,

On Wednesday this week, parts of the Diocese of Syracuse were placed in “Yellow” and “Orange” zones due to record level of COVID-19 positive cases in our communities and hospitalizations that are beginning to impact greatly the local health care system. There is concern in the medical community where such numbers are leading and local government officials facing a deluge of cases have admitted they cannot keep up with contact tracing,

There are restrictions placed on public businesses and gatherings in both the “Yellow” and “Orange” zones. For most in the “Yellow” zone, the restrictions are reminders to be more careful in following safety protocols. However, in the “Orange Zone” the restrictions involve closures of some businesses, including schools, and reduced occupancy capacity. For Houses of Worship in the “Orange Zone”, it is 33% occupancy or no more than 25 congregants at a time.

Now, in the midst of all of these happenings, late Wednesday evening, the US Supreme Court ruled barring restrictions on religious services in New York State. It was in response to legal suits brought by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and representatives of the Jewish faith. Although Chief Justice Roberts was of the dissenting opinion, he did note that, “Numerical capacity limits of 10 and 25 people, depending on the applicable zone, do seem unduly restrictive.”

So on Friday, as we prepare for the beginning of the Advent season and our celebrations of the Lord’s Day, where does this leave us? In my mind, the need to exercise extreme caution due to the rampant spread of the coronavirus in our communities. Last evening, I learned of a Catholic parish in Lewis County where anyone who attended the 11 am Mass this past Sunday are now quarantined for two weeks, including the two priests of the parish. It was not because they didn’t follow protocols, rather someone who was present was asymptomatic and on Monday tested positive and local health officials felt that in order to halt further spread quarantining was necessary.

Such practical knowledge leads me to believe that we need to stay the course we set out on earlier in the week and follow the current regulations of the “Yellow” and “Orange” zones. My one exception would be that we do not turn away those who come to Mass on Sunday who haven’t registered as long as it does not violate our diocesan safety protocols concerning social distancing and occupancy. I believe we have justified reasons to be so cautious at this time and to mitigate the number who might face quarantine. I feel also that in this time where social contact can be heightened due to the Christmas shopping season and gatherings, we must do our part to lead the way in ensuring greater public safety.

There is an axiom that states, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” It is my hope that by taking this cautionary approach now more drastic measures will not have to be taken as we approach the Christmas season. I will keep you posted on any future changes, but for this weekend please follow the current regulations in place for the public good. With a brother’s care and the promise of prayer in the coming Advent season,

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse

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