



Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Apostolic Administrator

June 3, 2020
St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, Martyrs

Dear Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Belleville,
Dear Members of Parish Reopening Teams,

It has been my custom for many years to greet you with the words, “May the Peace of Christ be with you!” These words have never been more heartfelt as our nation continues to struggle with the deadly coronavirus pandemic which has brought pain, suffering, death, and financial losses to so many. Added to that is the brutal murder of Mr. George Floyd by a former police officer, Derek Chauvin. Now, the justifiable, peaceful demonstrations concerning the painful Racial Divide in this country are being undermined by the nation-wide destructive civil unrest that has cost more innocent lives, destroyed needed neighborhood businesses, and turned the attention of the nation away from Mr. Floyd’s death and the concerns of non-violent demonstrators. The crisis has been exacerbated by the rhetoric of some elected officials and some extremist groups. Representatives of the media have not only informed us but also have, at times, reinforced various biases. I share your anxiety, concern, and bewilderment in the face of this sad and volatile situation. Let us pray that St. Charles Lwanga and his Ugandan companions, who were brutally martyred, will intercede for us and for the United States before the Prince of Peace.

When we participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, we are fed on the Body and Blood of Christ. This is more than spiritual food that fills us with grace. It is nourishment that calls us to conversion to live by Christ’s Law of Love of God and neighbor, and work with sincere hearts for healing all forms of strife and conflict in our communities. We need this Bread from Heaven now more than ever. It is with a greater sense of urgency, therefore, that I write to you today to give you further instruction on the gradual reopening of our churches for the renewal of the sacramental gifts given by Christ to the Church at the Last Supper. Governor J.B. Pritzker has moved us into the next [Phase of his Executive Order](#) modifying the stay-at-home order with guidance for opening possibilities including our Catholic Churches. As you see in his new directive, the Governor has been very receptive to the recommendations made by the Bishops of the Province of Chicago.

I wish to thank the leaders of our parishes who have been working hard to prepare for the reopening of our churches. The information provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health continues to suggest that the safest approach for the celebration of the Eucharist is to provide

livestream Masses. That is the only way to guarantee that churches will not become sources of infection. As I have stated in my letter of May 13, 2020, once the celebration of Sunday Eucharist begins, the Bishops have decided to keep the current dispensation in place. However, if the safety procedures provided in the [Sacramental Guidelines](#) in the Parish Reopening Plan are strictly adhered to, and parishes have completed the necessary preparations to receive the faithful back into the church, **parishes may begin the regular celebration of the Eucharist this weekend, June 6-7.** The guidance given by the Governor's office should be studied and observed carefully by all priests and deacons and the parish leaders and teams assisting in the reopening of the churches in our diocese. That guidance should be read in light of the Guidelines issued by the Bishops of the Province. It is of utmost importance for the health and wellbeing of all that we remember what we learned from the diocesan Guidelines in the Parish Reopening Plan in Phase I and Phase IA and apply them to Phase II. Governor Pritzker suggests limiting attendance to 25% of building capacity, or a maximum of 100 attendees, whichever is lower. The 6-foot social distancing rule still applies as does frequent hand sanitization. Masks will be required in the church before, during, and after the celebration of the Eucharist.

I would ask you to print the [Parishioner Reopening Guide](#) and give to all parishioners as they enter the church this weekend. This will make the transition easier. This Guide offers to the Christian Faithful helpful tips on what to do before they arrive at church, what to expect when they get there, and what to do during and after the Mass.

If you are planning on establishing a ticket or reservation system, now is the time to do so. There are many apps available. Be sure to allow for those individuals unsure of or unable to use computers or cell phones to make reservations. Provide the parish office phone number and assign a team member to pick up the voicemail reservations. **It is important that you reassure those who are concerned about immigration status that no information other than their name is needed to register.** There should be no requirements to include phone numbers, mailing addresses, or any other type of contact information to register to participate in the Eucharist.

It is very important that you post the [Social Distancing Poster](#) at various locations throughout the church, i.e., front entrance, bathrooms, exits, bulletin boards, etc. You may print as many copies as needed. The Office of Worship **has sent three copies** of the poster to each parish. If you are unable to print or need additional copies, please contact the Office of Worship and posters will be printed and sent to you.

Please study carefully the [Physical Space Planning](#) and [Parishioner Movement Guides](#) with your co-leaders and appropriate team members. These guides will instruct you on how to mark the pews and floors appropriately and give directions to your Ushers and Greeters so they can provide clear guidance to parishioners as they enter, process through, and exit the church. Unfortunately, at this time and probably into the near future, people will no longer be able to seat themselves, leave their pews for the Communion Procession on their own, or exit the church without direction. There should be only one entrance in which people arrive and one exit to leave. This can be a sensitive issue for some people. Patience and a spirit of cooperation will be required by all.

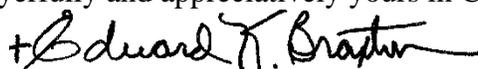
With this letter, I am giving permission for you to reopen your churches for the celebration of Mass beginning June 6-7. **However, I am very aware that all parishes are not yet ready to reopen.** I am counting on the parish leadership to be mindful of the seriousness of this pandemic and act out of an abundance of caution. Do not rush to reopen if you are not truly prepared. Move at your own pace. Be sure that all safety precautions have been taken. Make certain that volunteers have all been well-trained. Double check your supplies; everything should be available before church doors open. Please take your time and be vigilant in following carefully all of the guidelines that I have sent you. The Office of Worship will certainly continue to help you in this process and provide as much assistance as possible.

I know that for some parishes with limited staff and resources this may be a particularly tedious undertaking. You and some of your parishioners may even wonder if this is really necessary. We remind ourselves of a central teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

“The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch. The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship we offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.”

I thank each of you for your hard work and generous dedication to these efforts to make it possible for the People of God to gradually return to the House of the Lord to sing His praises and plead for His guidance at this difficult and uncertain juncture in our history. May we all heed the words of Mr. Floyd's brother, Terrence. “We are a peaceful family, a God-fearing family. We do not want violence, stealing, and burning down our stores. We want the end of racism in America. We want justice and peace.” St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, Pray for us! *Oremus pro invicem.*

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Belleville

P.S. All of the resources referenced in this letter are available on the diocesan website:
<https://www.diobelle.org/main-rotator/1405>