

origins

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Letter on Reopening Churches at Larger Capacity Than State Allows

Bishops of Minnesota

Minnesota's bishops declared they would move ahead with plans to resume Masses at one-third church capacity May 26, a plan that defied then-current state directives limiting faith-based gatherings to 10 or fewer people. The bishops announced the plan in a May 20 letter following a news conference where Gov. Tim Walz and other members of his administration outlined a plan for the reopening of restaurants, bars and salons. With no definite timeline from the state for a wider reopening of places of worship despite repeated requests from the bishops and several meetings with

“Given the well-researched protocols that we have proposed ..., how can reason require us any longer to keep our faithful from the Eucharist?”

members of the Walz administration, the bishops said they were giving parishes state-wide permission to begin celebrating public Mass. “Our decision to suspend the public celebration of Mass was painful,” the bishops said in the letter. “We made that decision not because we were compelled to do so, but because we judged that the circumstances required it. We believe that those circumstances have changed, as confirmed by the governor’s decision to end the stay-at-home order and allow more commerce.” Their plan, they said, would allow parishes to begin celebrating Mass at one-third capacity ahead of and in preparation for Pentecost, May 31. The bishops emphasized that they have demonstrated willingness to collaborate with the Walz administration and that they have sought guidance of state health officials to strengthen safety protocols. After the bishops released the letter, the governor said faith services could resume at 25% capacity, and the bishops agreed to this cap (see statement by Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis in this edition of *Origins*). The bishops’ letter follows.

The Catholic bishops of Minnesota, along with many people of faith, were disappointed in Gov. Walz’s May 13 announcement that he would end the stay-at-home order to allow more commerce but prohibit religious gatherings of more than 10 people.

We have attempted to work collaboratively with the Walz administration

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