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Bishop Persico announces option to return to public celebration of Mass
Dispensation from obligation to attend Mass remains in effect

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, used a virtual town hall on May 21 to announce that he will allow pastors of parishes throughout the Diocese of Erie to begin offering public Masses on June 1. He also issued a significant series of protocols regarding the return to public worship, meaning not every parish will be positioned to celebrate public Masses immediately.

“It’s not like turning a light switch on,” Bishop Persico said, in making his announcement. Recognizing the deep desire people have expressed about returning to Mass, he emphasized his concern about the seriousness of COVID-19 several times and pointed to the health and well-being of the community as a top priority.

Bishop Persico also announced that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday and Holy Day Masses remains in effect. He asked that the elderly and people with vulnerabilities continue to participate via livestream rather than attending Mass in person. And he also encouraged those

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who are not yet comfortable with being in public to continue worshipping from home.

Bishop Persico indicated that he will suspend Mass again in any county the governor returns to the 'red' phase.

"There's no doubt the road ahead has significant challenges for all of us," the bishop said in his opening remarks. He called on people to have patience and charity with each other and with their pastors as everyone determines the best way to move forward.

"Some of our pastors are elderly or may have other health concerns," he said. "I will support their decisions about whether or not they feel comfortable offering public Mass." The bishop recognized that some people may need to travel to neighboring parishes for Mass in the immediate future.

Earlier in the day, Bishop Persico issued protocols to the priests of the diocese. The priests had been invited to meet with their representatives on the priest council during the past two weeks to review preliminary thoughts on the topic before the council convened for final recommendations to Bishop Persico on May 20.

During the town hall, which is available through a link at www.eriescd.org, Bishop Persico responded to numerous questions that had been submitted by parishioners across the 13-county diocese in advance of the event. He also took questions that were submitted live, via a chat option.

"I want us to remember that the generations who came before us knew and understood sacrificial love," Bishop Persico said in his closing remarks. "Now it's our turn to earn the title of 'Greatest Generation.'"

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