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May 13, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

This letter comes to you as we continue to celebrate the great Feast of Easter. These fifty days leading to Pentecost are marked by unprecedented suffering as humanity has fallen victim to a perilous contagion. In addition to the threats to our physical wellbeing, we are suffering spiritually as the Covid-19 pandemic has required restrictions of our worship and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Surely, there have been moments in history when governments and rulers have persecuted Christians and banned their public worship. This is not one of them. Rather, the present restrictions come in response to an extreme medical emergency as local, state and federal authorities – specifically public health officials – legitimately fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard human life and the common good. They have based their reasonable guidance on careful consideration of empirical data and the best available disease-mitigation practices as they seek to contain the pandemic’s rampage through our communities.

While everyone must exercise good citizenship in observing these restrictions, I call on the Catholic faithful, both as good citizens and as advocates for justice and charity, to comply with these regulations. From the first pages of scripture we learn that we indeed are “our brother’s keeper,” a truth that must inspire us as we are called to sacrifice. We should also be motivated to cooperate with public safety norms, given our reverence for life and human dignity. This is, at its heart, a moment to proclaim the breadth and depth of what it means to be pro-life, particularly as this virus preys on the most vulnerable in our midst.

The good news is that a plan for a gradual reopening of our churches has now taken shape, as I note below. However, since our movements will be restricted as that plan unfolds in different phases, our priests will continue for the present time to offer Mass in private each day and to livestream and broadcast Masses where they have the capability to do so. These celebrations surely are not the same as gathering in our churches for Mass, but I know from hearing from many parishioners that they provide a great deal of solace and support in this time of uncertainty.

We must be honest. We expect this situation to continue for some weeks, and any plan for reopening our Churches for public worship must include every precaution to ensure public gatherings do not create a second wave of contagion, thus squandering the gains made through our sacrifice in these days.

With those realities in mind, I am heartened to announce that the Bishops have reached an agreement with the Office of the Governor on a multi-phase Plan for re-opening our churches for

the celebration of the sacraments, private prayer, adoration, and Mass. As I share the Plan with you, both by way of an Executive Summary and the full Plan in the following pages, I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the many people who have coordinated efforts between the Bishops of Illinois and the Office of the Governor for the many hours they have given to designing and fine tuning this agreement.

I want to assure you of my prayers for you and your family's personal, material, and spiritual wellbeing. Together, we will move forward as devout believers and as responsible citizens. Again, I call on all Catholics to seize this moment to exercise faith-filled citizenship in a way that reflects our deep regard for life, our calling as disciples of Jesus, and our love of country.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a stylized 'J'.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA