



DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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June 15, 2020

To the priests, deacons and seminarians in the DOLR,

Here is the latest!

Regarding Confirmation: The advice I have received from you so far about the celebration of Confirmation once things return to “normal” has been generally as follows:

- We should continue with no entry or recessional procession of the confirmandi.
- We should plan to always celebrate Confirmation in a Mass except when celebrated for the traditional Latin Mass community.
- Based on the principle of subsidiarity, we should let the pastor decide whether to present the candidates individually by name or as a group, generally basing his decision on the number of those to be confirmed.
- If at all possible, we should have the bishop continue to anoint all the confirmandi himself.

Phase 2: Governor Hutchinson has announced that as of today, the state will enter phase 2 of lifting COVID-19 restrictions. For places of worship (as well as restaurants, etc.) this will allow occupancy of up to 2/3 of capacity, so long as masks are worn and sanitizing and physical distancing measures continue to be observed.

- Given our principle of subsidiarity and given the fact that some counties are presently far more impacted by COVID-19 than others, I will leave it to individual pastors to determine whether their particular parish is ready to move to phase 2.
- **In any event, all of the restrictions of phase 1 are retained in phase 2, except** that overall occupancy limits can be raised from 25% to 66% so long as mask-wearing and physical distancing of 6’ (occupying every other pew and 6’ spacing laterally between groups in the pew) is retained. Reaching 66% will only be possible in parishes where there are large family groups within which physical distancing is not required.

Racism: In addition to my statement on racism (<https://www.dolr.org/article/bishop-issues-statement-racism>), the USCCB has issued guidance regarding practical steps for eradicating racism, as follows:

Practical Steps for Eradicating Racism--An Invitation

With the aid of Holy Scripture, Catholic social teaching, and sacred tradition, this is an open invitation to journey toward reconciliation. Racism is evil because it attacks the inherent dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. The persistence of racism demands our attention now. Racism emerges in the actions and inactions of individuals; and it is embedded in our institutions and public policies. Our faith calls us both to personal conversion and to transformation of our society. The following are some actionable steps pastors and their communities may undertake to this end:

1. Read (or re-read) *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* using the accompanying Study Guide. Visit <http://usccb.org/issues-andaction/human-life-and-dignity/racism/index.cfm>

2. Create various large and small group opportunities for parishioners to process their feelings in the midst of news and commentary about vulnerable populations and law enforcement. Encourage participants to reflect or share their own upbringing regarding comments in the home, from parents and individuals, media and entertainment, even practices of the Church about the merits or demerits of certain groups of people made to be “the other.” Ask how have I knowingly or unconsciously made this formation part of my world view?

3. Arrange a safe space for young people to reflect and pray about racism and recent events. Listen to the current experiences of young people. Encourage and allow their creative expression. Invite them to generate methodologies that are meaningful to them.

4. Attend an intergenerational interracial virtual town hall discussion on racism. Respect that for some African Americans, Hispanics and others talking about personal racial experiences in a mixed race setting is painful as it is like reopening a wound that hadn’t fully healed.

5. Use a pastoral and non-partisan lens to respond to concerns of parishioners, clergy and staff about racism, policing and public safety. Do not politicize this. Lean on Gospel values, instead.

6. Meet with chaplains and chiefs of police departments to discuss possible actions. Engage the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils in this discussion.

7. Invite Diocesan Vocational Directors to incorporate regular dialogs among seminarians about their experiences with racism, prejudice and racial discrimination.

8. Create a mechanism for the bishop to hear confidentially from clergy about their personal experiences or understanding of bigotry, privilege, supremacy, bias or indifference to racism. Discuss how these experiences manifest, hinder or complicate their ministries.

9. Invite a conversation with a group of African American, Latino, Indigenous or African men and/or young people about their personal experiences with law enforcement.

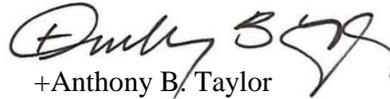
10. Encourage homilists to preach against racism and for personal responsibility to eradicate it. Explore how anti-racism looks. Continue to study and understand racism as it manifested in the past and does so today.

This resource was developed by: The Subcommittee on African American Affairs, Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church © United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

We certainly do live in challenging times and Jesus offers us the special privilege of being the light in these times of darkness and fear. Racism is our nation's original sin and people look to us to bring the light of God's truth and the healing balm of love of neighbor to this deep wound in our nation's soul. I commend those of you who have spoken out boldly on this topic and I assure you that even if they don't want to hear it, most people do know that the symbols of oppression—for instance, the Confederate battle flag and offensive statues erected in the Jim Crow era have got to go. Likewise, I thank you for encouraging your people to comply with the COVID-19 precautions of our state not only when on Church property, but also elsewhere. I was in western Arkansas and southern Oklahoma last weekend and entered about 5 different stores for various things, and shockingly, other than the manager of one of the stores, I was the only person with a mask on—not the cashiers or other employees and none of the other customers. I felt like quoting Forrest Gump: "If you're gonna be dumb, you'd better be tough!" except that in the case of COVID-19, it's the weak and vulnerable who are going to suffer the most.

Thanks again for your faithful service!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony B. Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "T".

+Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock