



Supreme Court and The Mass: Fathers, I write this morning to acknowledge, explain and offer guidance regarding the Supreme Court's action yesterday, February 5, 2021. Here is the substance of their ruling:

The application for injunctive relief presented to JUSTICE KAGAN and by her referred to the Court is granted in part. Respondents are enjoined from enforcing the Blueprint's Tier 1 prohibition on indoor worship services against the applicants pending disposition of the petition for a writ of certiorari. The application is denied with respect to the percentage capacity limitations, and respondents are not enjoined from imposing a 25% capacity limitation on indoor worship services in Tier 1.

This is not the FINAL Court Ruling but rather an important intermediate step. The Supreme Court was petitioned to hear the case AND to grant 'injunctive relief' while the case is being heard. It is my understanding that the Case is still pending BUT the request for injunctive relief has been granted. This signals the leaning of the Court but is not yet the final decision.

Certain parts of the restrictions from gathering indoors for worship are still in place. The Court specifically mentions that the 25% capacity rule remains as does the prohibition against singing and chanting. It does not mention the 100-person limit and so I am opining that, if 25% capacity in your church exceeds 100, then only the 25% capacity rule applies, not the maximum of 100.

Thus, effective immediately, in accord with the injunction issued by the Supreme Court, I allow any pastor to make a local determination about the prudence and safety of opening for indoor worship this weekend, February 6-7. You have my permission to do so.

I would propose, that, if you choose to open indoors, you also provide some means for accommodating those who may be uncomfortable about coming inside and who prefer to remain outdoors. Many of you already have live-stream capability and this should continue. Some places have also provided an outdoor venue where the streamed Mass can be viewed on site. This also is something which could be done or explored, if feasible, for your location.

I know you have been and will continue to be scrupulously careful about sanitizing and masks. I commend you for your diligence. We know that the fears and the dangers surrounding COVID-19 continue and I encourage all of you to continue to very sensitive to those whose fears sometimes are presented as anger. There may be some anger about the opening of churches but there has been a long-standing failure on the part of State officials to respect the carefulness, cooperation and the efforts of the church in regard to the virus. This ruling does not mean that we, as a church, are free to ignore the State but rather that the State is not free to ignore our rights and the rights of our people to both assemble and worship.

Brothers, I would ask that you make efforts to communicate this message, which may be overlooked by some pastors, to all in your county and or deanery.

Persevere! Be Safe! God bless you for all your efforts for the sake of souls during these most trying times. **PRAY for better days!**

Bishop Robert F. Vasa
Bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa