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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In so many ways—large and small—the pandemic has upended our lives together. Families and, in a special way, young people, have faced distressing struggles. The pandemic made our connections with one another challenging and difficult. Exactly in that moment when we truly needed supportive relationships with one another, we found ourselves separated. Sadly, this included the relationships and connections that we have in and through the Church.

We did our best to move forward and I am proud of our collective response to the challenges of the pandemic. When I announced a general dispensation from the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass, many parishes offered on-line Sunday Masses, and went even further and established prayer lines and reached out to those in need. The TV Mass that I celebrated helped to keep us connected as a community of faith in Chicagoland. So many of you have told me how healing and comforting those Masses have been.

In the meanwhile, we are in a new moment. With vaccinations and boosters, restrictions on public gatherings have eased up. Many people feel more comfortable returning to Church. Yet, we know there are some elderly and immuno-comprised persons who are still not ready to return. And they should not return. These vulnerable brothers and sisters have an excusing cause for being absent and for this reason I will continue the TV Mass on ABC for the present time. But for the rest of us, I have decided, in consultation with my advisors, to lift the general dispensation from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass as we begin a new Church year on the First Sunday of Advent, November 26-27.

My hope is that the First Sunday of Advent will provide us with a fresh start to take up again our life together as a community of faith that gathers to worship God. I have asked our pastors to begin the Masses on November 26-27 with the traditional lighting of the Advent wreath. After the homily your pastor will lead the community in a renewal of baptismal promises, acknowledging that we owe our obligation to participate in Sunday Mass to God but also to each other. Our common profession of faith and of our desire to turn away from sin, will be concluded by a sprinkling rite with the waters of baptism.

Let this occasion of our renewal of faith and life, which we all so much want, provide us with a fresh start as we recommit ourselves to worship God and to be supportive of each other week after week as we gather around the Table of the Lord to be nourished and renewed.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Chicago