



# ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

## **Faith Forward Returning to Public Worship Executive Summary**

The Archdiocese of New York is a large, diverse community of 2.81 million Catholics. We serve the city in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx, plus Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, Westchester, Ulster, Rockland and Putnam counties. Since our founding in 1808, our mission has been to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, aware of the local area and the world, the spiritual and the material, the present and the future. We do this through ministry, service, prayer, education, and community, working with pastors, deacons, religious men and women, catechists, teachers, parish staff and volunteers at our nearly 300 parishes.

The lifeblood of the archdiocese's mission stems from the Mass and the sacraments. It is here that our people are inspired to serve their brothers and sisters in the broader community, and are sent forth to engage in evangelization and charitable works.

Since the outset of the COVID-19 crisis in the New York region, our churches have been closed to public worship. This was, indeed, a sad but necessary step to take for the health and safety of our parishioners and local communities. And it has worked.

Healthcare and government officials have now announced a phased plan to begin to reopen. To date, the "NY Forward" plan does not outline a process by which houses of worship will reopen their doors.

The Catholic community in New York is eager to resume public worship in a safe and responsible manner and in coordination with state and local government and health officials. Our people believe that worship is an essential service. To that end, we are proposing a phased plan which follows the latest guidance from the CDC and which, at the same time, respects our traditions. We believe that public worship can continue to take place safely in an era of social distancing.

Our plan includes the following policies and procedures:

- Churches will be regularly sanitized and disinfected. Signage will be placed on entrance doors instructing anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the church. Parishioners must wear masks.
- Attendance at each individual Mass will be limited to no more than 25 percent of a church's occupancy permit.
- No physical contact during the Sign of Peace will be permitted.

- Parish safety committees and ushers will be trained to receive parishioners and escort them to suitable seating arrangements set up for social distancing for the protection of priests and parishioners. Ushers will wear masks and not make physical contact when greeting parishioners. Orderly arrivals and departures will be coordinated by ushers and parish security teams.
- Pews will be prepared to safeguard parishioners and will follow published protocols (see enclosed sample seating arrangements) based on:
  - Singles
  - Couples
  - Families with one child
  - Families with more than one child
- Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) will be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every liturgy. Restrooms will be cleaned between Masses.
- Hand sanitizer dispensaries will be available at all church entrances.
- At arrival and departure times, entrance doors will be propped open to limit contact with door handles. Where possible, pedestrian movement patterns will be instituted that will minimize the potential for close contact between parishioners, including dedicated access ways for entrance and departure. Signage will be used in implementing these measures.
- Utilization of lower church/parish center facilities for additional Masses if the Church is full, and live video display of services will be continued in order to alleviate any overflow in attendance.
- Holy water and baptismal fonts will be emptied.
- Additional Mass times may be added at the pastor's discretion.
- Worship aids will be discouraged. Online worship aids will be encouraged. If paper worship aids are used, they should be limited to one page, and attendees should be directed to take them with them after Mass. If worship aids are left in a pew, they must be collected and destroyed after each Mass.
- No paper bulletins will be distributed. Instead, parish bulletins/news will be posted to the parish website or emailed to parishioners.
- Non-essential gatherings will be suspended, including Children's Liturgy of the Word, post-Mass social gatherings/refreshments, etc.
- Communion will be distributed only via the Host; the Precious Blood will not be offered.
- A cantor will be permitted, but large choirs will not be used.
- Collection baskets will not be passed from person-to-person. Baskets with long handles will be allowed. Ushers taking the collection will wear masks and gloves. Large baskets may be placed

at church exits for people to drop envelopes or donations. Ushers must immediately sanitize their hands after the collection.

- Offertory counters will wear gloves and masks, and practice social distancing.
- There will be no greeting of people after Mass.
- Tables and chairs in gathering areas will be put into storage so as not to invite people to use them.
- Baptismal pools or those with fonts that flow into a basin will be emptied after each use.

More detailed information regarding these policies may be found in the accompanying document, "Returning to Public Worship: Guidelines for Sacramental Celebrations."

By taking these steps, we are confident that we can assure our parishioners of their safety when attending church. For this reason, we are proposing that the Archdiocese begin its phased plan for reopening churches in tandem with the "NY Forward" Phase 2, which will coincide with the reopening of other professional and retail services.

The Archdiocese looks forward to working with state and local officials to realize its goal of bringing the Mass and sacraments back to the Catholic community responsibly and expeditiously.