



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

FAQ on Restoring the Sunday and Holy Day Obligation in the Archdiocese of Denver

When will the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation be restored?

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021.

Catholics who have not already returned to Mass should use the Easter season to prayerfully discern if they have a serious reason that prevents them from attending in person. If not, they should begin to resume normal attendance over the next several weeks in anticipation of the obligation being restored.

See below for more on what constitutes a serious reason.

Why are Catholics normally obligated to attend Mass?

As Catholics, we are invited by God to gather together in community, and participate fully in the Sunday Eucharist, which is the “source and summit of the Christian life.”

“Participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church. The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity. Together they testify to God's holiness and their hope of salvation. They strengthen one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Catechism 2182

The Sunday and Holy Day obligation is not something God asks of us out of his own necessity or need to be worshipped, but rather a gift to the faithful for our own spiritual well-being, happiness, and eternal salvation.

Recommended reading: <https://denvercatholic.org/only-one-thing-is-necessary/>

Why is the general dispensation being lifted?

In the interest of promoting the common good, the dioceses and our parishes have taken many steps to help protect public health during this global pandemic.

This briefly included suspending in-person Masses last March and April, and then instituting thorough protocols and guidelines to make sure our public Masses could resume in as safe of a manner as possible.

As the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our Christian life, we have always considered Mass to be an essential activity and have done our best to balance public health concerns while still providing access to the Mass and Sacraments to the faithful.

A general dispensation was granted when public Masses were initially suspended and kept in place while it remained reasonable for any Catholic to decide it was prudent for them to stay home.

However, for the last several months we have been encouraging Catholics to prayerfully consider if they have a prudent reason to stay home, or if they are just using the dispensation as an excuse.

Now, as the worst of the pandemic seems to be behind us, access to the vaccine for those who desire it has increased, and many other areas of life continue to move back towards normal, the time has come that a general dispensation is no longer necessary for every Catholic.

Does this mean everyone is obligated to go to Mass again?

No. Long before this pandemic, the Church has always recognized that there are “serious” or “grave” reasons that prevent Catholics from attending Mass.

For example, if a person is sick or homebound, or living/visiting areas of the world where access to the Mass is limited, or a situation arises that prevents travel (snowstorm or flat tire), such persons would not be bound by the obligation.

In the case of this pandemic, serious or grave reasons would include:

- Anyone who is sick, symptomatic, or has been recently exposed to the coronavirus. Protecting the health of others is an act of Christian charity and our moral duty to one another.
- Anyone with significant health risk factors that requires them to avoid public spaces, or if you care for someone with significant risk factors.
- Anyone who cannot attend Mass through no fault of their own, for example, if a parish has reached capacity.

Recommended reading: <https://denvercatholic.org/dispensationsan-excuse-to-skip-mass/>

I am unsure if I have a “serious reason” to stay home, what should I do?

Anyone who is unsure about their personal situation should speak with their pastor or any priest.

Will there still be safety protocols at Masses?

Yes. Parishes have consistently followed the recommendations of public health experts during the pandemic and will continue to take prudent steps to ensure that public Masses are celebrated in a safe manner.

As positivity rates and health protocols will continue to vary across the state, please check with your local parish for specific guidelines.

Are Masses safe to attend?

For almost a year, the dioceses and parishes have implemented thorough safety protocols based on the recommendations of health experts. While entering into any public space has included some risk, the precautions taken by our parishes have proven to be extremely effective, and we are unaware of any issues of community spread happening at a public Mass.

Is a vaccine required to return to Mass?

No. The [Bishops of Colorado have affirmed](#) that receiving certain COVID-19 vaccinations is morally acceptable, but that it is a matter of personal conscience and a private health decision. They have also stated that vaccination should never be a requirement for admittance at any public event including public Masses. However, regardless of if one gets vaccinated, all Catholics should continue to take prudent steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus until this pandemic has completely passed.