

Diocese Starts Phase 2 for Masses Beginning June 6-7

Bishop David Malloy issued a letter June 1 to diocesan pastors authorizing them to move to the second phase of reopening for public Mass celebrations beginning with Masses on June 6-7.

The second phase allows for more people at Masses.

However, parishes can only welcome more parishioners if they have completed all the necessary requirements issued in "Back in His Presence" and complete at least one week of Masses with groups of 10. Health and safety guidelines for the gradual reopening listed in "Back in His Presence" were issued in early May so parishes could begin offering Mass to groups of 10 on May 25.

"Effective with the Masses for the weekend of June 6-7, parishes that have already been certified and that have celebrated for at least one week Masses in the presence of the 10 faithful, may seek authorization to increase the number of faithful present to a number not to exceed 30% of the seating capacity of the parish church. The actual number of the faithful who can be accommodated in each church will vary from parish to parish from that maximum number in order to faithfully implement the necessary spacing for social distancing," Bishop Malloy's letter stated.

The second phase of the reopening also allows for parishes to hold services for the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass. This provision is offered to parishes so they may especially accommodate vulnerable individuals who do not come to Mass or others who could not get a place at Mass through the various reservation systems.

Bishop Malloy indicated however, that these services "can only be done in church and in strict conformity to the relevant guidelines of 'Back in His Presence.' "

These incremental steps to bring larger groups back to Mass have been taken by the Rockford Diocese and all the dioceses in Illinois, on the advice of medical professionals who warn that the coronavirus is more easily spread in large groups in confined spaces.

Even though over 70 diocesan churches are now certified to hold public Masses, the faithful are reminded that the COVID-19 virus is still active and initial precautions to mitigate the spread are still in force. Catholics are reminded that:

- All vulnerable individuals with underlying health conditions, compromised immune systems, those aged 65 and older and anyone feeling sick are asked to please stay home.
- Those individuals may watch Masses on television or online and make a spiritual communion.
- A dispensation from the obligation to attend Holy Mass has been granted during this pandemic until further notice.
- All those attending Mass must adhere to the requirements of social distancing, wearing of masks and proper sanitation before and after Mass.

Keep checking for changes

Catholics are asked to visit rockforddiocese.org or the Diocese of Rockford on Facebook for all the latest updates in regard to the churches' response to the coronavirus.

Also, due to the rapid adaptations parishes have made in regard to scheduling Masses, blessings, online Masses and other services at each parish, Catholics should be sure to check their personal parish websites, apps and social media for alerts and available Mass times.