



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
**PITTSBURGH**  
NEWS

111 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

E-mail: [communications@diopitt.org](mailto:communications@diopitt.org)  
[www.diopitt.org](http://www.diopitt.org)

**Contact:** **Ellen Mady**  
**(o) 412-456-3129**  
**(c) 412-961-4888**

---

**For Release: May 8, 2020**

**DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR THE  
GRADUAL REOPENING OF CHURCHES**

In continued alignment with local and state public health and wellness guidelines and recommendations, the Diocese of Pittsburgh is preparing to allow Churches to reopen for private prayer, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as well as continuing directives regarding small weddings and funeral Masses.

“Our strategic reopening plan will be done in phases based on comprehensive recommendations from a diocesan COVID-19 Task Force Team in coordination and consultation with state and regional health care leaders,” said Bishop David Zubik.

The changes will take effect Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, when four more counties in the diocese - Allegheny, Butler, Greene, and Washington – will move to the state’s “yellow” level of reopening. Lawrence county moved to yellow today, May 8. Beaver county remains in “red” until further notice, with the strictest stay-at-home orders still in place.

“We rejoice to move with care to our experience of the Eucharistic community of the Church in the celebration of Mass and the sacraments. The decision to suspend public Masses and close Church buildings was truly heartbreaking, but it was made with the health and wellbeing of the community in mind. We have, and will continue to be vigilant in doing our part to help “flatten the curve” of the spread of COVID-19. Through all of this we have seen, in so many ways, that Christ is with us always,” Bishop Zubik said.

The Bishop established the diocesan COVID-19 Task Force to develop a strategic plan, timeline, and guidelines for welcoming people back to Churches safely. The plan is divided into phases that encompass liturgical, and cleaning and sanitization guidelines that must be met for reopening. The guidelines will be reviewed by pastors and priests, and posted for the faith community, so they know their part in creating safe prayer environments.

The first phase, starting May 15, includes the following:

- All previous directives remain in effect.
- Limited funeral Masses and weddings continue, with cleaning/sanitizing guidelines in place, expanding to groups of no more than 25 people.
- Churches will be permitted to open for private prayer with safety guidelines in place including seating in designated areas only, the use of masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing.
- Churches open for Confessions – Confessionals do not meet public health safety requirements, and as such, Confessions will be heard at posted times and in a manner that preserves the sanctity of the Sacrament. Penitents must practice social distancing and all other safety guidelines.
- Livestream Masses and prayer services will continue.

Again, parishes will be permitted to reopen after meeting cleaning and sanitizing guidelines, and informing visitors they must follow public health directives including wearing masks, and honoring social distancing requirements.

Moving forward from this phase, the diocese will look to return to the public celebration of the Holy Mass, with changes in place to allow for a safe experience, respectful of social distancing, and health and hygiene guidelines. More details will be released as we come closer to the next phase.

“Although we are all so eager to get back to some sense of normal,” said Bishop Zubik, “we recognize that these sacrifices have been essential to keeping each other safe during this deadly pandemic. I am greatly appreciative of all in our faith community who have shown a great amount of patience during this unprecedented time.”

“Perhaps now more than ever before, every one of us and especially our families, are called to deepen their prayer life. Prayer can change hearts and the world,” Bishop Zubik said.