

Subject: Maine Parishes to Offer Indoor, Public Masses with Restrictions in Place Starting June 1

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Maine Parishes to Offer Indoor, Public Masses with Restrictions in Place Starting June 1

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PORTLAND---Effective Monday, June 1, the Diocese of Portland is allowing Maine churches to hold public Masses with restrictions and safeguards in place (**below**).

"We are, of course, anxious to return to our churches and have the opportunity to celebrate Mass," said Bishop Robert Deeley. "We have been preparing for the last few weeks for a safe restoration of Mass in accord with the guidelines of the CDC. There are a lot of things involved, but we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to keep people safe and fulfill the mission of the Church."

All public Masses were temporarily suspended on March 18 due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass continues to be in place, and the extensive list of live-streamed Masses being offered at churches around Maine (www.portlanddiocese.org/live-streamed-Masses) will continue as most parishioners won't be able to attend in person due to the capacity restrictions.

"Some of the restrictions may seem to be too cautious for the faithful who wish to return to public Masses at this time," said the bishop. "However, ensuring the safety and health of our clergy, employees, students, volunteers, parishioners, and the greater community remains our top priority."

Action plans and registration procedures are being developed at each parish, but there are guidelines that must be followed at all Maine churches:

- No more than 50 people can be in attendance at any Mass. That includes the priest, lector, cantor, and other church personnel.
- A fair and equitable registration process for parishioners who want to attend Mass must be established at each church/parish to ensure the restricted attendance capacity is not exceeded.
- Anyone from outside of Maine who has not quarantined for 14 days in Maine prior to Mass may not attend.
- Masks will be worn by those attending Mass to protect against the projection of respiratory particles.
- Pew seating arrangements will be established to keep each person at least six feet from the next person.
- Communion will be offered with social-distancing guidelines adhered to in the form of six feet of space between recipients. The distribution of the shared consecrated wine for the faithful is still suspended. Holy water fonts will remain empty for the time being.
- Seats and pews will be sanitized after each Mass. Every other pew will be used and the flow of foot traffic will go in one direction if possible to avoid crowding (separate entrance and exit ways, keeping within fire safety codes).
- Churches will have proper resources available to clean the church following the Mass with staff members and volunteers receiving proper training and PPE equipment in advance. Cleaning will consist of all pews, knobs, door handles, bathrooms, altars, musical equipment, and touched surfaces.
- No social gatherings are allowed before or after any Mass.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers will be positioned in churches.

In addition, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions and who might be at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are asked not to attend.

For more information about parishes' reopening plans, visit www.portlanddiocese.org/ReopeningChurches.

Any changes to the current schedules of live-streamed Masses, parking lot Masses, drive-thru confessions, parking lot and live-streamed adoration, and other special events will be updated on the Diocese of Portland's Coronavirus Response page (www.portlanddiocese.org/response-coronavirus).

For more information, e-mail Dave Guthro, Communications Director for the Diocese of Portland, at dave.guthro@portlanddiocese.org.