

Our Lady of Consolation Catholic Church

1235 Badger Court
Charlotte, NC 28206
704-375-4339

May 23, 2021

A LETTER FROM YOUR PRIEST

*Re: Phase I of Reopening the Parish
and Returning to Face to Face Operations*

Dear OLC Family,

It is my hope that you, your families and those closest to you have prayerfully managed your way through the difficulties of the last year. We are all looking for the best way forward and brighter days ahead. While none of us were prepared for a pandemic, OLC has weathered the storm, responded accordingly and continued to serve our parishioners and those in our surrounding community. We have many to thank for these efforts, and we pivoted to meet these needs. We will continue to engage parishioners with activities and events, some of which will remain remote for the foreseeable future, others will be face to face, and some may include both options for greater flexibility. You will be hearing more about our Reopening Launch that will allow us to gradually open our parish in ways that will be comfortable for everyone.

The first phase of our reopening begins on May 30, 2021, and I am excited to Welcome You Back! In accordance with the latest guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), North Carolina Executive Order 215 and the Charlotte Diocese, effective immediately, parishes may reopen by following certain norms. In an effort to welcome back as many people as possible, while maintaining protocols that I feel are best for our parish, we will be observing the following protocols as set out below.

Liturgical Services:

- 1) Mass Sign-Up will no longer be required and Masses and confessions will return to their pre-COVID schedules beginning Sunday, May 23, 2021. Please remember there are two available masses on Sundays, one at 8:00 a.m. and one at 11:00 a.m. The Mass Schedule for all masses remains the same and is posted and updated on the website at www.ourladyofconsolation.org.
- 2) Masks/face coverings will still be required and enforced while inside the Family Life Center during all Masses and visits inside the parish office buildings.
- 3) Confessions will be available by appointment. Please contact the church office to schedule.

- 4) The options of receiving Communion from the chalice and extending the Sign of Peace will remain omitted until further notice.
- 5) The faithful retain the right to receive Communion on the tongue or in the hand.

Mass Obligation:

- 1) Effective on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021, the general dispensation from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation was narrowed to include only those who remain vulnerable to the coronavirus. (See the FAQ's attached to this letter for more clarification).

Immense Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Basile Sede', written in a cursive style.

Fr. Basile Sede
Pastor

Returning to Mass FAQ's¹

1. When will the obligation to attend Mass be reinstated?

The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation in the Diocese of Charlotte will be reinstated effective Sunday, May 23, 2021. However, some exemptions will continue (see # 4 below).

2. Why is the exemption from Mass ending now?

It is important that we begin returning to Mass, when and where possible, in recognition of the essential and central nature of the Eucharist in our lives.

In the challenging year since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, we all have adapted to protect the health and well-being of everyone in our communities. Safety precautions in place at our churches, such as capacity limits and rigorous cleaning protocols have proven effective at making in-person worship possible without undue risk of spreading the virus. As a general proposition, the requirements have been relaxed for these reasons. Each parish may continue to adopt its own protocols based on the needs of each parish, but shall now reopen for Mass. And while live streamed Masses have been a means to help us nourish our souls when we could not be physically present in church, we must remember that "virtual" worship should not become the norm. For Catholics, unmediated contact with the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in offering this sacrifice to God the Father is irreplaceable and essential.

3. Does this mean everyone is now obligated to go to Mass again?

No. We know there remain concerns about the spread of infection, and we must remain vigilant to limit its spread, particularly among those most vulnerable. With this in mind, there are particular exceptions (called "dispensations") granted to people in certain circumstances including those who are ill and those who care for anyone who is at risk of serious complications from COVID-19.

In reinstating the Sunday obligation, we must welcome back to Mass our parishioners who are now engaging in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling, partaking in non-essential shopping, and widening one's circle of contacts. Returning to Mass is an acknowledgement of our need and desire for the Eucharist to nourish and strengthen us.

4. So, who is still exempted from attending Mass?

People who are ill or vulnerable to infection are still encouraged to stay at home and attend Mass virtually, on TV or online. If you live in the diocese (or are visiting within the diocese) you are not required to attend Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation if:

- You are ill or your health would be significantly compromised if you were to contract a communicable illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category).
- You exhibit flu-like symptoms.
- You have good reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (such as being in recent contact with someone who tested positive for a contagious illness such as COVID-19 or influenza).
- You care for the sick, homebound or infirm.
- You are pregnant, or caring for small children.
- You are 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation of high-

¹ Adapted from the Charlotte Diocese.

Returning to Mass FAQ's²

- risk individuals).
- You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (such as no Mass is offered, you are infirm, or you are prevented for some reason you cannot control).

If you have questions about whether these exemptions apply to you, or if you have significant anxiety about returning to Mass, please contact me or the parish office. These categories will be reviewed and revised as needed.

5. Was this decision made in consultation with healthcare experts?

Yes. We have monitored the guidelines and requirements from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, local health officials, and recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. All decisions regarding our practices during the pandemic have been informed and guided by experts in the medical community, in conjunction with the diocese.

6. Are some safety precautions still in place?

Yes. The health and safety of our communities has been and remains paramount as we continue to monitor local conditions. While the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services no longer recommend social distancing or face coverings for those who are fully vaccinated, anyone who is vulnerable or not vaccinated is encouraged to continue wearing a face covering and to follow social distancing norms. To encourage a spirit of inclusion and safety for those who wish to return to Mass at OLC, we will continue to offer social distancing seating of 3 feet apart as opposed to 6 feet apart, continue to require masks/face coverings, congregants will still be required to hand sanitize during Communion, and Ushers will continue to spray wipe chairs between each Mass. In addition, congregants' reception of Holy Communion from the chalice and the Sign of Peace will remain omitted. These requirements have been adopted by our parish, as each parish may have different protocols.

7. Are there still capacity restrictions at churches in the Diocese of Charlotte?

As shared above, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services no longer recommend social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated. As such, as a general proposition, religious services in the diocese no longer require social distancing for people who are not vulnerable to the coronavirus. However, the diocese allows each church to implement protocols that do allow for maintaining seating with social distancing and masking protocols depending upon the pastoral needs of the parish.

8. Will parishes still live stream Masses?

Yes, OLC will continue to offer the live stream and recorded option. Not only are Parishes encouraged to continue offering the option of a live streamed Mass, but we have found it to be a new and innovative way to reach more individuals and parishioners in our community. Live stream helps to nourish the souls of those who cannot be physically present for Mass. Please visit the website for our live stream information. Additionally, please continue to check the website and/or contact the office at 704-375-4339 for more information as things continue to be adapted and updated as we move through our reopening process.

² As adapted from the Charlotte Diocese.

Returning to Mass FAQ's³

9. Will the general dispensation be reinstated if the pandemic worsens locally?

The diocese continues to monitor the incidence of coronavirus in North Carolina and the effectiveness of our safety protocols. We will make any adjustments necessary in order to preserve the health and wellness of everyone in our community.

10. Why are Catholics normally obligated to attend Sunday Mass?

The command to "Remember the sabbath day - keep it holy" comes to us from God's 10 Commandments to Moses (Ex 20:8-11). The Lord's Day was moved from Saturday in the Old Testament to Sunday by virtue of Jesus' Resurrection on this day.

We have a moral obligation to set Sunday apart from every other day of the week to worship God in gratitude and thanksgiving. In fact, the word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word for "thanksgiving."

The most salutary way we do this is by participating at Sunday Mass. The Mass - particularly the Holy Eucharist - is the very heart and foundation of our Catholic faith. It is during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that the saving death and resurrection of Jesus are made present to us, our covenant with Our Lord is renewed, and God, in the person of Jesus Christ, comes to us and makes Himself truly present for us in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. It is an irreplaceable gift, a foretaste of heaven itself.

We know the challenges of the Christian life are great and we need nourishment and community to successfully "run the race" (2 Tim 4:7). Gathering at Mass on Sunday to hear God's Word and to offer our lives as spiritual worship (Rom 12:1) along with the Body and Blood of the Lord present on the altar are indispensable tools God gives us for our salvation.

Even if you meet the circumstances for being exempted ("dispensed") from attending Sunday Mass, you can still observe the Lord's Day. Refrain from unnecessary work and spend time in prayer on Sunday, perhaps reading the Scriptures and meditating on the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. Daily and Sunday Mass readings are online. You can also participate in a broadcast of the Sunday Mass via live stream from our website, www.ourladyofconsolation.org, donate and make an Act of Spiritual Communion.

God Bless and We Look Forward to Welcoming you Back to Mass!

³ As adapted from the Charlotte Diocese.