



Looking Ahead:

What to Expect When We're Back in Our Churches

Whenever the current restrictions are eased and we are able to gather for Mass again, it is important for all of us to understand that things will not immediately “go back to normal.”

Both Governor Carney of Delaware and Governor Hogan of Maryland have announced the development of multi-phased guidelines with the goal of easing restrictions in the coming weeks and months.

We know the desire to participate in the liturgy and receive the Eucharist is incredibly strong and we are exploring ways to address this concern, while continuing our care and concern for the physical and spiritual health of all. We ask everyone to please continue to be patient and charitable as we work through these difficult times.

While specific details of “when” and “how” public Masses will resume are still being determined, the following things will be important for parishioners to consider:

- **The general dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will remain in place.** Regardless of when restrictions are lifted in Delaware or Maryland, there will understandably be people, especially people in vulnerable or at-risk groups, who will feel it is safer to stay home than attend Mass. Potential limits on crowd sizes that are allowed in parishes will also play a part. The faithful are encouraged to keep the Lord’s Day holy by participating in a parish livestream Mass.
- **When our churches begin to reopen, physical distancing will likely still be in place.** The six feet separation restriction will likely still be required. You may be asked to wear a face covering, as recommended by the CDC. If you are in a vulnerable category (i.e., older adult, 65 years and older; person who is immunocompromised), you may continue to be encouraged to remain home. Anyone who is ill, or suspects he or she is ill, should refrain from participation in public activities, including Mass. In addition, in light of CDC monitoring recommendations, anyone who arrives at the church and is exhibiting symptoms may be asked not to attend Mass out of an abundance of care and caution for others. Parishes may have procedures for receiving communion that maintains this distancing.

- **Attendance at Mass and church spaces may continue to be limited.** It is expected that restrictions for any large gatherings will remain in place. Only a certain number of pews or chairs may be available for use. Hymnals may be removed, and paper worship aids utilized.
- **Liturgical changes will likely remain in effect.** For those able to attend Mass, similar practices like those in March will likely remain in place, e.g., distribution of Holy Communion under one species, no exchanging of the sign of peace, no holy water fonts, etc.

In time, each parish will be asked to assemble a parish plan for reopening based on CDC recommendations that addresses the parish’s local circumstances in each phase set forth by the governors.

Even though parishes will take all reasonable precautions, and sanitize as best they can after each liturgical celebration, including the restrooms, there will still exist the risk of infection for anyone who attends a public Mass as we move through the various phases of easing restrictions. No one should expect that they will be safer in church than in any other public space.

Safety concerns, in addition to the virus itself, will determine the timeline. During Mass on Tuesday, April 28, 2020, Pope Francis prayed for prudence as communities begin lifting their lockdowns. The Holy Father said, “At this time, when we are beginning to receive instructions for coming out of quarantine, we pray that the Lord would give his people – all of us – the grace of prudence and obedience to the instructions so that the pandemic does not return.” As this process unfolds, there will certainly be challenges, but the safety of our communities will remain the benchmark. As the Diocese moves forward, we request that parishioners stay informed and stay flexible to any updates.

Please keep in mind, we will all experience challenges and frustration as we navigate through these weeks and months ahead. Each parish, based on their local circumstances, may implement guidance from the Diocese differently.

Let us continue to keep those sick and afflicted with the COVID-19; those on the front-lines (medical professionals) caring for the sick; those who have died as a result of the virus; and all of our fellow parishioners and parishes in our prayers in these days ahead.

Diocese of Wilmington

For more resources please visit: www.cdow.org/coronavirus