ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

What to Expect When Public Mass Resumes

May 11, 2020

As painful as the decision was to suspend all public Masses in the Archdiocese of Newark, during the Covid 19 pandemic, the process was straight-forward and necessary for the common good.

As we see numbers flatten and decrease, we are beginning to sense the situation improving. In the interest of the common good, we do not want to contribute to a second wave that could disrupt our liturgical life.

As health restrictions are eased and we are able to start gathering together again, it is important for everyone to accept that things will not immediately go back to life before the Corona virus.

Health experts and civic leaders are currently determining new guidelines and restrictions for the next weeks and months, and at the same time the Archdiocese of Newark is planning for how public worship will be celebrated with respect to any new regulations.

We know the desire to return to your parishes, participate in the liturgy, and receive the Eucharist is incredibly strong, but we ask that everyone approach this reopening with a patient, loving and charitable mindset.

The specific details of when public Mass will resume and how it will be celebrated are still being determined, but the return will occur through a three-phase gradual process. **Each phase will be rolled out with specific dates and directives to follow determined by Archdiocesan leaders.**

Phase 1. Churches will first be opened for personal prayer only. Individuals and families can come to church for quiet prayer, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation may be celebrated if social distancing can be maintained and masks are worn.

Phase 2. Following on Phase 1, churches will be permitted to celebrate public weekday Masses and funerals with very specific restrictions, such as the strict practice of social distancing, use of masks and limited number of people present.

Phase 3. Following Phase 1 and 2, churches will be permitted to celebrate Sunday Mass publicly with the obligatory practice of social distancing, use of masks and limited number of people present. All other sacraments will resume according to the directives during Phase 3.

Five Things to Be Mindful of During the Return Process

1. **A general dispensation from the Sunday obligation will remain until further notice.** The dispensation for the obligation to attend Mass will remain in effect. No one will be required to attend Mass when public celebrations resume. Hence, live stream Masses for parishioners at home will continue.

2. **Attendance will be limited.** We know restrictions will remain on holding large gatherings, so we are working with parishes to determine the best way to ensure safety. Communications will come from the parish so parishioners will know how many people can attend any given Mass. It is likely that all parishioners may not be able to attend Mass regularly at first.

3. **Social Distancing will be practiced.** Expect that your parish will have pews/rows that are taped off, and that households, even of one individual, will be asked to keep six feet of separation from each other. No one will be admitted without a mask. Parishioners should take their temperature before coming to Mass. Anyone with **any** symptoms of sickness **must** stay home.

4. **Liturgical changes will be in place.** Similar to protocols established when churches were closing, extra precautions will be taken. Temporary adjustments will be made to how we celebrate Mass and receive Communion.

5. **There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass. Even with best health practices and strict social distancing, anyone who enters a public space should recognize there is a risk of contracting the coronavirus. Improved cleaning will occur at our churches, but no one should expect that they will be any safer from germs than in other public spaces.**

Finally, we should recognize that this is a unique time and we need to continue to work together to make progress. There will be challenges and frustration. You may not be able to attend Mass at your parish the first few weeks it resumes. However, we believe these guidelines are a call to love our neighbors.

If we all work together, we can incrementally expand our options and increase our participation in the liturgy. However, if we look for ways to get around the regulations, we will likely contribute to the sickness and death of others, creating situations that force us to take steps back. Each of us is called to be faithful members of the Body of Christ as we implement the reopening of our churches. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do in our parish communities.

"Be strong and take heart, all who hope in the LORD." *Psalm 31:25*

PHASE ONE

The specific date for the commencement of Phase One will be May 17, 2020. Consideration will be given to the policies of state and local authorities. Parishes and ecclesiastical communities should not take it upon themselves to implement these phases without prior authorization from the Archdiocese of Newark.

1. Cardinal Tobin continues to dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday as well as from "Easter duty" (the obligation to receive Holy Communion during the season of Easter).

2. Churches may be opened solely for personal prayer during limited and designated hours. Individuals and families enter the church for quiet prayer only. During opening hours, a parish staff member must be physically present in the church to ensure social distancing and sanitizing. No gatherings are permitted.

3. In accord with national, state and local health directives, those who show symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to an infected person are not permitted to enter the church for 14 days.

4. Holy water fonts must remain empty until further notice.

5. Hand sanitizer should be made available throughout the church.

6. Public celebrations of liturgies, devotions, or other group prayer are not permitted at this time.

7. Masks must be worn by all individuals while in the church.

8. Individuals and families must maintain social distancing (six feet) between each person while in the church.

9. The pastor will ensure that there is prominent notification within the church regarding the requirement of masks and social distancing.

10. Pews, door handles and knobs, restrooms and high traffic areas of the church should be wiped down and sanitized at regular intervals with the removal of trash and other items from the pews.

11. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be offered at specified and limited times.

    a. Confessionals are not to be used.
    b. Social distancing must be maintained by those waiting for the sacrament and attention be given to maintaining the seal.
    c. Masks must be worn by confessor and penitent.