

# CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

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May 8, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the “Responsible Restart Ohio Plan” is implemented during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, allowing a gradual return to work and lifting of some of the restrictions regarding consumer, retail and services, returning to operation, we your bishops, together with you, are anxious for the safe return to the public celebration of Mass/Liturgy. While making every effort to respect the spirit of the governor’s instructions, we want to begin in some way to make the public celebration of Mass/Liturgy available. To that end, we inform you that the bishops of Ohio have agreed that each diocese will determine a soft opening date later in May granting permission for the public celebration of weekday Mass/Liturgy, where it can be achieved safely and where pastorally possible, with less than 50 percent occupancy of the Church building, respecting social distancing. This plan provides for the possibility of the gradual return to the public celebration of Mass/Liturgy and prepares us for the Solemnity of Pentecost on the weekend of 30/31 May, when Sunday Mass/Liturgy will be publicly celebrated.

During the next few weeks, we will be working with our pastors and diocesan pastoral staffs to prepare for a soft opening of public celebration of weekday Mass/Liturgy. To this end, we ask our pastors with their parish staffs to prepare to implement a rigorous effort to fulfill guidelines, which will be forthcoming from each Diocese/Eparchy, to include maintaining social distancing, recommendations to provide a safe environment, and instructions for the distribution of Holy Communion.

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass/Liturgy remains in effect. As your bishops, we continue to be cautious and concerned for those who are most at risk, the elderly and those with serious health issues. We also remain deeply concerned for our priests, many of whom we find in this category. We strongly urge those who are most vulnerable and their caregivers to stay at home, and we implore those who are not feeling well, or who fear that their own health or that of their family may be compromised, to refrain from coming to church at this time. We thank you for your patience, understanding, and cooperation as we implement this gradual return to the public celebration of Mass/Liturgy.

Together, we continue to pray for all who are suffering from Covid-19, for all health care workers and first responders, for all the deceased and their families, and for an easing of the anxiety and tension caused by this pandemic. Relying on the Motherly care of Our Lady, Health of the Sick, we unite our sufferings to those of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we trust in the glorious hope of His Resurrection.

Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr  
Archbishop of Cincinnati

Rev. Donald P. Oleksiak  
Diocesan Administrator of Cleveland

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas  
Bishop of Toledo

Most Rev. J. Michael Botean  
Romanian Eparchy of Canton

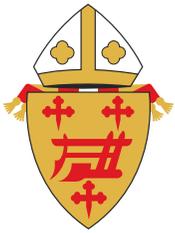
Most Rev. George V. Murry, S.J.  
Bishop of Youngstown

Most Rev. Bohdan J. Danylo  
Ukrainian Eparchy of St. Josaphat

Most Rev. Jeffrey M. Monforton  
Bishop of Steubenville

Most Rev. Milan Lach, SJ  
Byzantine Eparchy of Parma

Most Rev. Robert J. Brennan  
Bishop of Columbus



# ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Office of the Archbishop

May 8, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past eight weeks, the Bishops of Ohio have met on a regular basis to discuss recommendations and requirements put in place by the State of Ohio and the medical profession to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. Early in those discussions, we very reluctantly agreed that we had to suspend the public celebration of Mass for the safety of our parishioners and for the common good of our communities. These past weeks and months have been very difficult, but I am grateful to our priests, deacons, and lay leaders who continued to show genuine pastoral care for our people by staying in contact with parishioners in very creative ways. Many parishes live streamed Mass, connected with parishioners through phone calls, opened their churches for private devotions, offered spiritual reflections in online videos, etc. I am deeply, deeply grateful to all who have taken these initiatives. I am also grateful for all of you who have maintained spiritual closeness through these and other means and continued to live the Catholic faith in your homes.

On May 8, the Bishops of Ohio issued a statement by which we informed Catholics in the State of Ohio that, while making every effort to respect the spirit of the governor's *"Responsible Restart Ohio Plan,"* we will begin to make the public celebration of Mass available once again. **In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, public Masses will begin on Monday, May 25.**

At the same time, I must emphasize that this is not going to be "a return to normal." Health and safety requirements and recommendations must continue to be followed. Among these are social distancing, the use of face masks, and concern for the most vulnerable.

Because of social distancing, church capacity will be significantly reduced and the number of people who attend a particular Mass will have to be regulated and limited. Please remember that you have been dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, and that dispensation will remain in place for the foreseeable future. Thus, those who wish to participate in Mass and receive Holy Communion can do so by attending any Mass that is celebrated any day of the week. I am asking our pastors to make every effort to have a Mass celebrated publicly in every parish/region every day of the week beginning May 25.

Pastors, priests, deacons, parish staff, and volunteers are establishing respective guidelines for public health in each parish church. Please be respectful of these guidelines. Those who are elderly or vulnerable should continue to stay at home, mindful of the dispensation from the Sunday obligation. Parishes are asked to try to find ways to safely bring Holy Communion to shut-ins. People who are fearful that they may be putting their health, or the health of their family, at risk should likewise continue to remain at home.

On Sunday, May 3, the first Sunday of the month of May, a month dedicated in a special way to give honor to the Blessed Virgin Mary, I re-consecrated our archdiocese to the maternal care of Mary. In the prayer of consecration, I prayed: "Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother ... In this time of pandemic, we come to you, our sign of sure hope and comfort ... bring everyone under your protection and entrust everyone to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."

With the Blessed Virgin Mary interceding on our behalf we will get through these challenging times and draw nearer to her Son, the Good Shepherd.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr  
Archbishop of Cincinnati

**RADIATE CHRIST**