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# Catholic Diocese of Columbus

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## **The Return to Public Worship and Sacramental Life in the Diocese of Columbus**

### **Introduction**

We have been through a lot together these last weeks. I appreciate all of your sacrifices and patience. On March 16, 2020, I announced what to then would have been unimaginable – the suspension of public Mass here in Ohio. At the time the known facts and the unknown questions were overwhelming. Yet our participation in the State-wide efforts seem to have made a significant difference to allow the medical professionals to meet the Covid-19 virus in an orderly way and to save lives. We grieve those who died and pray for them and their families. We continue to pray for those who are ill and in harm's way. And we thank all those who have served us in so many ways at great personal cost.

We look forward to the return of public worship in a way that honors those sacrifices by “opening” in a way that is responsible and provides for the health, safety and well-being of all. The Eucharist is the very heart of our life together. This time has been difficult for all. The resumption of public worship later this month is a sign of hope but will also mean a great deal of careful planning and hard work. Thanks you in advance for your flexibility. What follows are some General Guidelines applicable to all parishes and institutions.

### **The Return**

Churches may be opened starting next week. Safe distancing, hand hygiene, and regular cleaning of likely-touched surfaces are to be maintained. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, without solemn exposition or benediction, is permissible.

Regular confession times and public daily Masses may begin May 25. Safe distancing, hand hygiene, and regular cleaning of likely-touched surfaces are to be maintained.

Public Sunday Masses may begin on May 30-31.

### **General Guidelines for the Faithful**

Bishop Brennan dispenses the Catholic faithful who reside in the Diocese of Columbus and all other Catholics currently in its territories from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass until September 13, 2020.

Those who are “high risk” are especially those highly susceptible to COVID or those who manifest symptoms of COVID. Those “susceptible to COVID,” include those over the age of 70 or those who have serious health conditions. Symptoms include a cough of any kind or a fever. Those who are “high risk” are especially cautioned to avoid public gatherings, including Mass until it is safe for them to attend. Though we wish that all could gather with us for the Eucharist, we cannot guarantee complete safety at this time.

We ask for your ongoing patience and flexibility. It is likely that we may not be able to accommodate safely everyone desiring to come to Mass. We ask for you to consider other options for attending Mass, such as by livestream, in overflow chapels, at other Mass times, or at a public daily Mass.

Those attending Mass are asked to maintain hand hygiene. Hand hygiene includes washing their hands prior to coming to Mass, bringing their own hand sanitizer, sanitizing their hands before and after touching any surface, and avoiding needless touching any surfaces.

Those attending Mass are asked to maintain physical distancing before, during, and after Mass. Physical (safe or social) distancing is defined as maintaining six feet separation between others. Members of the same family are not bound by safe distancing.

Those attending Mass are asked to wear a cloth face covering, unless they are under the age of two. Parishes are encouraged, if possible, to offer masks for those who do not have their own.

Parishes will be developing specific procedures for a safe environment for the return. Such planning includes making hand sanitizers available at the entrances of the church, disinfecting commonly touched areas, limiting seating to ensure safe distancing. Mass schedules may need to be altered to ensure sufficient time for disinfecting. Overflow locations or advance ticketing may be necessary for safe distancing. Those “high risk” persons are not to serve in a liturgical ministry or as a volunteer for Masses. Ushers and greeters will be required to wear masks and gloves.

Our celebration of the Mass will seem a little different. Holy water will not be available. Masks will be worn by priests, deacons, and eucharistic ministers at the distribution of Communion. Music will be limited. No offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) will occur. The distribution from the chalice is omitted. The instruction “Let us offer the sign of peace” and subsequent sign of peace is also omitted. The distribution of Communion will follow safe distancing practices. The reception of Holy Communion in the hand is strongly encouraged.

These instructions remain in place until further notice from the bishop’s office.