



Archdiocese of
Washington

What to Expect When Public Masses Start to Resume

When 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.”

Recently, the Governor of Maryland and the Mayor of the District of Columbia announced the expectation of multiple phases when beginning to ease restrictions occurs. Concurrently, an archdiocesan team has been planning for liturgical celebrations in the future, taking into consideration any new guidelines.



While we are still working on the details, the list below are some things we all need to keep in mind when the time comes to worship together again:

Social distancing will still be in place. The six feet separation restriction will likely still be required. You will 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 desire to remain home during the initial reopening. 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. When it becomes possible to receive Holy Communion again, parishes will have procedures for receiving communion that maintains social distancing and other precautions.

- Attendance at Mass will continue to be limited.** It is expected that restrictions for any large gatherings will remain in place. However, our plan includes how parishes will allow worship in the Church while adhering to guidelines in place by local jurisdictions at a given time.
- Church seating will be limited.** Only a certain number of pews or chairs will be available for use. Hymnals may be removed, and paper worship aids utilized.
- Dispensation from the Sunday and holy day obligation will remain,** due to the limited number of faithful who might be able to attend Mass and gather, and too, recognizing that those in a vulnerable category may choose to remain home. Parishes should continue livestreaming/recording Mass for the faithful.
- Liturgical changes will remain in effect.** For those able to attend Mass, similar practices like those in March will remain in place, e.g., distribution of Holy Communion under one species, no exchanging of the sign of peace, no holy water fonts, etc.

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.

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 Archdiocese in different ways.

Let us continue to keep those sick and afflicted with the COVID-19; those on the front-lines 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.