



DIocese OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

• P.O. Box 230, Wheeling, WV 26003 •

Friday, May 8, 2020

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Releases Guidelines to Resume Public Celebration of Mass

WHEELING, W.Va.—Most Rev. Mark Brennan, Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, has released a set of directives for the resumption of public Masses in the Catholic churches in West Virginia. “When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, “the Bishop said, “we entered a Phase I, suspending the public celebration of Masses and closing our churches to protect the health and safety of our people. This new Phase II is a transitional phase, requiring the full cooperation of clergy and laity so that public Masses may be celebrated in the safest manner possible, until we can enter Phase III, the return to normal practice in our liturgical life.”

The directives were developed by a committee of clergy and lay leaders headed by Msgr. Eugene Ostrowski, the diocesan Vicar General, with input from pastors from around the State. They respect Catholic liturgical and pastoral principles as well as the guidance given by the Center for Disease Control, the World Health Organization and Governor Justice’s recommendations. They are formulated with great care to preserve the reverence due the Eucharist and its spiritual value for the faithful as well as our people’s physical wellbeing. The complete list of the directives is posted on the diocesan website: www.dwc.org.

Notable Directives

1. Public Sunday Masses are scheduled to begin with the Masses of May 23-24, 2020, if the parish plan submitted by the pastor in accordance with these directives is approved by the Bishop.
2. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains in effect until further notice. Sick persons and those more susceptible to infection – the elderly, those already in frail health – are urged to remain at home and participate in televised or online Masses. Anyone who fears being infected by attending Mass should stay home.
3. Social distancing will be required at Mass. Those who live in the same household may sit together; otherwise, there must be six feet of separation between persons. Every effort will be made to accommodate the faithful who come but once the reduced seating capacity of a church is reached, no others may enter the church. Some parishes will be able to arrange for audio/visual participation in Mass from a hall or gymnasium.
4. The faithful are to wear masks during Mass, except in the moment of receiving Holy Communion. If at all possible, they should bring their own masks, which may be made at home.
5. Some common though optional practices of a Catholic Mass will be omitted: the use of hymnals, holding hands at the Our Father, the Sign of Peace, the offering of the Precious Blood of Christ to the faithful.
6. In churches with multiple Masses, the church (and hall or gym, if used) will have to be sanitized between Masses, as well as before the first Mass and after the last.

Bishop Brennan said, “I am grateful to Msgr. Ostrowski and his team for their careful work on this plan to keep our faithful and our clergy as safe and healthy as possible as they ‘go rejoicing into the house of the Lord’ to celebrate together the sacred mysteries of our faith.”

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