



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

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Guidelines for Resuming Limited Public Mass | Effective 9 May 2020

The following guidance is presented to the lay faithful and pastors of the Archdiocese of Denver as public Masses resume, in a limited manner, in the Archdiocese of Denver. Further guidance will be issued as needed.

Public authorities are right to place reasonable limits on gatherings, to discourage unnecessary activities, and to call for physical distancing. At the same time, participation in the Mass and reception of the Eucharist is of great importance for the spiritual good and the overall well-being of the faithful. As Catholics, we maintain that participation in the Sacraments is more important than many other commercial activities considered to be essential.

Note: No set of guidelines can address every scenario nor can they create uniformity across all 150 locations where Mass is typically offered. Differences between locations will inevitably occur as the date for openings and the number of participants permitted will vary by county and the capacity of the parish facilities. Magnanimity should be observed by all.

1. Considerations for those participating in Mass:

- **Limited Numbers:** Due to the restrictions being observed, the number of people who will be able to attend each Mass will be greatly reduced. Thus, the faithful should not expect to attend more than 1 or 2 Masses during the month of May. This may be different for rural parishes or for accommodations made for outdoor Masses.
- **No Sunday or Holy Day Obligation:** The faithful have been dispensed from their Sunday and Holy Day obligation to participate in the Mass until further notice. Keeping the Sabbath holy should include an intentional time in prayer including engagement in the readings for the day, which may be enhanced through watching a pre-recorded or live stream Mass and making spiritual communion. The Archbishop will continue to offer live stream Mass each Sunday. Furthermore, families with children should pray with them and teach them how to keep holy the Sabbath and the live the faith of the Church. Programs are available for families to use at home with their children, e.g., the Augustine Institute, denverparish.org, etc.
- **Discern the Risk:** Even with best practices, the risk of infection exists anytime a person leaves their home. The faithful should take under consideration their age, health, who they are bringing, etc. It is still recommended that those 65 or older and those who have severe underlying medical conditions remain at home.
- **Germ Mitigation:** Those who attend limited public Masses should: plan to wear a mask, refrain from unnecessarily touching any surfaces, respect social distancing (remaining at least 6-feet away from others), use hand sanitizer when it is available, follow the directions for seating in the church, gym, or outdoors, and stay home if they are sick or symptomatic. Safeguarding the health and welfare of others, not just oneself, is the moral duty of Christians.
- **Prepare Children:** For those who may attend Mass with children, make sure that children 3 and older have a mask and understand the need to wear it, and explain social distancing to them.
- **Schedule:** The times when Masses are offered will probably be different than the traditional schedule parishes used to follow. The faithful must check with their parish as to when Masses will be offered each day and the process for attending a Mass. Once a Mass is full, the laity will need to see when the next available Mass is scheduled. This will vary from parish to parish depending on space availability. The important thing is to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist when available, regardless of the day. Scheduling processes should prevent individuals from being able to attend multiple Masses before others have had the opportunity to attend one.

2. Considerations for parishes:

- **Mitigate group sizes and flow of people:** A group of people, in the same space, and observing appropriate physical distancing should be limited to 10. No matter the size of a group, advanced preparation should take place and instructions should be given so that pinch points do not infringe upon physical distancing. Pews will need to be marked off with where people can sit.
- **Dispensation from Place:** Pastors may choose to use spaces other than the principal church for the celebration of Mass or distribution of the Eucharist. This may include parking lots, outdoor spaces, gymnasiums, halls, etc. Guided by prudence, such decisions may increase the number of faithful able to participate in the Mass and receive the Eucharist. Allowing for safe distancing, it is possible to have multiple groups within a large space or different parts of the same building, so long as the groups do not intermingle. For example, if a parish hall has monitors for people to watch the Mass, an EMHC may go over to the hall to distribute the Eucharist.
- **Determining who attends:** According to the size of the congregation and the spaces utilized, a consistent and fair method for selecting and communicating who can participate in each Mass should be developed. Parishes should consider having one person who understands the tool/method being used, to oversee the process of setting the list for those who attend each Mass. Some good online options include: [SignUpGenius.com](https://www.signupgenius.com); [SignUp.com](https://www.signup.com); [Calendly.com](https://www.calendly.com).
- **Social Distancing:** In a church, create proper distance between those in the sanctuary and those participating in the Mass: the first two rows of pews/chairs should be blocked off, then, at least every other row should be blocked off. A minimum of 6-feet of separation should be observed between those participating in Mass. Families who live together may sit together without physical distancing and may be considered as a combined unit. Taping 6-foot marks on the floor of the space leading up to where communion is distributed can be helpful. Other systems for distributing the Eucharist may be devised, e.g., the minister going to the people rather than the people coming forward, etc.
- **Ushers:** A knowledgeable, welcoming, and calm person could be very helpful in encouraging mask wearing, observance of social distancing, answering questions, receiving donations, etc. Within groups, a participant can serve as an usher, giving appropriate direction.
- **Offertory:** A centralized basket should be visible and pointed out during the Mass so that the faithful can make a donation in person if they desire. Online giving options should also be mentioned.
- **Times:** Pastors should not feel bound to historical Mass times. Mass times and frequency relevant to the current situation should be selected. Priests may celebrate up to two Masses each day and three on Sunday (Deacons may assist at the same number).
- **Communication:** Parishes should deploy all means possible to communicate the process for participating in limited public Mass. Efforts should be made to collect contact information of the faithful, then adding it to databases and communication channels.
- **Ministers:** Limited, but adequate clergy and other ministers should occupy the sanctuary, observing social distancing. So long as they do not intermingle with those attending the Mass, those in the sanctuary do not count in the tally of those attending.
- **Before and After Mass:** While people are able to arrive early and stay after Mass to pray, everyone should be made aware of when the prior/following Mass ends/begins. Furthermore, the faithful need to know the order for leaving the church/space so that no congestion occurs. No social gatherings are to be held before or after Mass.
- **Germ Mitigation:** Ensure proper cleaning of frequently touched surfaces in the church and between Masses, remove Holy Water from the fonts and, when possible, provide hand sanitizer. Priests and readers should not wear masks during the Mass. The faithful who have attended Mass should be encouraged to help with sanitizing of the church for the next group.
- **Hymnals and Missals:** Because of the difficulty in sanitizing missalettes and hymnals they are to be removed from the pews, disposable/single use aids can be produced if needed.

3. Liturgical Considerations:

- Suspend the exchange of the Sign of Peace and handholding.
- Suspend the distribution of the Precious Blood.
- It is not necessary that the priest be the one who distributes the Eucharist, especially if he is 65 or older; deacons or extraordinary ministers can help.
- Hand sanitizer should be used by the minister before and after the host is distributed.
- The host should be placed in the hand in a manner so as to avoid any skin-to-skin touching. Should this occur, hand sanitizer should be used before resuming distribution.
- The priest, prior to Mass or at the beginning of Mass, should reiterate to the faithful coming forward to receive the Eucharist to maintain 6-feet of distance as they approach the minister. He should instruct the faithful how to receive Communion in the hand in a reverent manner and to self-communicate. While wearing a mask, the faithful should establish a clear open palm pad for the minister to place the host on. Stepping to the side, they should take the host with their opposite hand, pull the mask down, consume the Eucharist, and then replace their mask.
- Avoid the use of a choir, instead use a cantor or one or two persons singing. It has been demonstrated that singing can increase the spread of the virus, thus congregational singing is not encouraged during this time.