



ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

Directives for Re-Opening Churches

May 11, 2020

One of the most difficult sacrifices for Catholics during this time of pandemic has been the suspension of most sacramental celebrations, especially the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The faithful hunger for the Body of Christ and the other Sacraments; pastors of souls yearn for the presence of Christ found in the gathering of God's holy people. While we are eager to return to our churches, the process must be executed in a safe and prudent way.

The purpose of these directives is to provide for a gradual return of the People of God to font and table, reconciliation and healing. What follows supersedes the directives issued for the Archdiocese of Newark on March 18, 2020 and March 25, 2020. **All pastors, parochial administrators, chaplains and other pastoral leaders are expected to follow these directives without exception.** The timing for the enactment of each of the three phases noted below will be announced by the Archdiocese of Newark, keeping in mind the requirements of civil authorities regarding public health during the pandemic.

As elsewhere, there needs to be a gradual re-opening of our liturgical life and thus these directives propose three phases. Even though the starting date for each phase has not yet been published, we share the details of each stage so that pastors and administrators can begin to prepare now. In issuing these directives, it is understood that not every parish may be able to offer public Mass due to particular circumstances, such as a heightened risk to the priest, the inability of the parish to provide the personnel called for by these directives, or to sanitize adequately the worship space between uses, as well as other circumstances.

These guidelines apply to all churches and places of public worship, even those not in a parochial setting, i.e. chapels, oratories, and any other space to be used for public worship. Religious communities may celebrate the Mass as is their custom provided the priest presiding is a resident chaplain. If participants are present from outside the community, the provisions below must be observed.

We thank all who persevered in faith and charity during these times of challenge, offering live streaming of your liturgy and prayer life and the many, many other creative ways you've reached out to your people. We urge you to continue such practices as necessary during this time of transition.

PHASE ONE

The specific date for the commencement of Phase One will be May 17, 2020. Consideration will be given to the policies of state and local authorities. Parishes and ecclesiastical communities should not take it upon themselves to implement these phases without prior authorization from the Archdiocese of Newark.

1. Cardinal Tobin continues to dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday as well as from “Easter duty” (the obligation to receive Holy Communion during the season of Easter).
2. Churches may be opened solely for personal prayer during limited and designated hours. Individuals and families enter the church for quiet prayer only. During opening hours, a parish staff member must be physically present in the church to ensure social distancing and sanitizing. No gatherings are permitted.
3. In accord with national, state and local health directives, those who show symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to an infected person are not permitted to enter the church for 14 days.
4. Holy water fonts must remain empty until further notice.
5. Hand sanitizer should be made available throughout the church.
6. Public celebrations of liturgies, devotions, or other group prayer are not permitted at this time.
7. Masks must be worn by all individuals while in the church.
8. Individuals and families must maintain social distancing (six feet) between each person while in the church.
9. The pastor will ensure that there is prominent notification within the church regarding the requirement of masks and social distancing.
10. Pews, door handles and knobs, restrooms and high traffic areas of the church should be wiped down and sanitized at regular intervals with the removal of trash and other items from the pews.
11. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be offered at specified and limited times.
 - a. Confessionals are not to be used.
 - b. Social distancing must be maintained by those waiting for the sacrament and attention be given to maintaining the seal.
 - c. Masks must be worn by confessor and penitent.

PHASE TWO

The specific date for the commencement of Phase Two will be announced. Consideration will be given to the policies of state and local authorities.

1. Cardinal Tobin will continue to dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days as well as from the “Easter duty”.
2. All provisions of Phase One remain in force.
3. Churches will be permitted to celebrate public Masses on weekdays as well as funerals. The following norms must be observed:
 - a. The maximum number of participants will be announced at the beginning of Phase Two.
 - b. The norms for celebrating weekday Masses are indicated in the provisions for Phase Three.
 - c. Because of the obligation of social distancing, weekday Masses should take place in the church, not small chapels.

PHASE THREE

The specific date for the commencement of Phase Three will be announced. Consideration will be given to the policies of state and local authorities. The provisions of Phase Three will remain in effect until further notice.

Before Mass

1. Cardinal Tobin will continue to dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days as well as from the “Easter duty”.
 - a. In accord with national, state and local health directives, those who show symptoms of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to another infected person are not permitted to enter the church for 14 days. It is recommended that Mass everyone should check their temperature at home before coming to church.
 - b. Those who are at risk because of an underlying health issue or who are 60 or older are strongly encouraged to avoid the risks posed by attendance at public celebrations of the Mass.
 - c. Parishes will continue to livestream the Mass, so that those unable to attend may maintain a spiritual connection with their local parish.
2. In order to comply with social distancing and reduce the spread of the virus, parishes will need to enact the following: Parishes may need to consider adjusting their Mass times, possibly adding to their schedule for the duration of Phase 3.
 - a. No more than 50% of the total seating capacity of the church can be permitted for a liturgy. This limitation should be communicated to the parish in advance.
 - b. Parishes will need to develop a system of registration to prevent participation greater than 50% of the actual seating capacity at any given liturgy.

- c. Six feet of distance must be maintained between households, even of one individual attending liturgy. Alternating pews should be blocked off. Others may be necessary because of the particular layout of each church.
3. Appropriate cleaning of high-use areas within the church should be done before each service.
 - a. It is desirable that the pews used by participants be wiped down before Mass.
 - b. All hymnals and missalettes should be removed from the pews and stored for the duration of the pandemic. No other materials may be left in the pews. The faithful are encouraged to bring their own liturgical resources for use during the celebration of Mass. If feasible, parishes may project hymns and responses on screens.
 - c. Restroom facilities and door handles, push plates, and knobs are to be sanitized after each service.
3. Holy water fonts must remain empty until further notice.
4. Hand sanitizer should be available throughout the church, whenever possible.
5. The faithful must wear a mask to enter the church and during the celebration of Mass, and for the brief moment while receiving Holy Communion. Ushers and other volunteers must wear masks and gloves throughout the celebration of Mass. Pastors are obliged to ensure that these obligations are enforced without exception. Those at the altar are to wear a mask if distributing Holy Communion.
6. Clergy and other ministers are to wear masks and maintain six-foot distancing and should not greet parishioners as they enter the church.
7. Information should be provided before the celebration regarding social distancing, the collection, the form of the Sign of Peace and the manner of receiving Communion.

During Mass

1. Doors are to be propped or held open before and after Mass to prevent people from touching the door handles, knobs or push plates.
2. Staff, ushers or other volunteers should direct people to specifically marked pews. As previously indicated, attendance will be limited to ensure compliance with social distancing requirements.
3. Families are to maintain six-foot distancing between their households, even of one individual, throughout the celebration of Mass.
 - a. Seating must be maintained with six feet of distance between members of one household and members of another.
 - b. One or two pews should be left vacant in between rows such that six feet of distance can be maintained in all directions.
 - c. All ministers, including music ministers and choir members, must maintain six-foot social distancing.
4. The entrance/recession procession should be done only if social distancing can be maintained.

5. The procession at the Preparation of the Gifts is suspended. Collection baskets (or any other materials) are not to be passed from one family to another, nor shall ushers take up the collection from the congregation. Instead, fixed baskets are to be used for donations from the assembly and should be monitored by the ushers until the donations are collected and handled according to the proper protocols.
6. There must be no physical contact during the sign of peace. A simple gesture, such as a bow or nod, is recommended.
7. It is recommended that separate chalices be prepared for each concelebrating priest and/or deacon.
8. Priests or deacons who are in at-risk groups are permitted to refrain from distributing Holy Communion and may delegate distribution to other Communion ministers.
9. For the distribution of Communion, ushers or other volunteers who are masked and gloved will ensure six-foot distancing in the Communion line. Floor markings may be placed six feet apart in the aisles to facilitate proper social distancing in all directions during Communion.
10. Communion ministers must be masked and sanitize their hands immediately before and after distributing Communion. Ministers should avoid physical contact when placing the host in the communicant's hands.
11. Holy Communion is only permitted in the hand. Distribution of Holy Communion from the chalice is prohibited to the assembly. For those who are gluten intolerant, special arrangements are to be made with the pastor.
12. Ushers or ministers of hospitality should assist in maintaining a single-file line during the distribution of Holy Communion in order for each Communion minister and communicant to maintain social distancing in all directions. Multiple Communion ministers may be used, provided one-way traffic patterns are observed.
13. When approaching the Communion minister, the communicant should make a slight bow of the head, receive the host in the hand, step to the side, lift his/her mask and consume the host.
14. Those who refrain from receiving communion still unite themselves with the sacrifice of Christ. Non-communicants are kindly asked to remain in their places rather than coming forward to request a blessing.

After Mass

1. Families and individuals should leave the church in an organized manner wearing masks and observing six feet of distance between other households. Ushers or ministers of hospitality may need to direct this process.
2. Ushers are not to hand out bulletins or other materials
3. Clergy and other ministers may only greet parishioners as they exit the church if they can maintain social distancing and avoid physical contact.
4. There are to be no receptions or social gatherings (e.g., coffee and doughnuts) following Mass.

5. It is desirable that pews and other high-traffic areas of the church be wiped down before the next service, with the removal of trash and other items from the pews.

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Although the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days has been suspended, there is a understandable urgency to livestream liturgies for the faithful. To ease the pastoral work of livestreaming during this difficult time, Cardinal Tobin has transferred the observance of the Ascension of the Lord from Thursday, May 21, to Sunday, May 24, 2020.

All parishes and places of worship will follow the directions given in the ORDO, page 137 “Where the Ascension is observed on Sunday.” This applies without exception to all Masses celebrated on Sunday, May 24, in the Archdiocese of Newark.

(On Thursday, May 21, the ORDO, page 133 “Where the Ascension is transferred to Sunday” is to be observed.)

BAPTISMS

Baptisms may resume only once **Phase Three** has commenced. An exception is when the person to be baptized is in danger of death.

1. All of the directives concerning limitations on attendance, social distancing, and masks in Phase Three should be observed.
2. Parishes should limit numbers of attendees according to number 2 of Phase Three above.
3. Fonts are to remain empty until further notice. Water should be blessed in a separate receptacle (large pitcher) and poured over each candidate.
4. Anointings may be done with a cotton swab. If done by hand, the minister must sanitize between each anointing.

CONFIRMATIONS AND FIRST COMMUNIONS

Confirmations and First Communions that were postponed by the directive of March 25, 2020 may be scheduled once **Phase Three** has commenced.

1. With these directives, Cardinal Tobin hereby grants delegation to all pastors/administrators: to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for those baptized Catholic as infants or children. whose Confirmation was postponed due to the pandemic until December 31, 2020, only. Any pastor/administrator who wishes to Confirm must take part in a virtual workshop offered by the Office of Divine Worship prior to celebrating Confirmation.
2. Once Phase Three has begun, pastors/administrators and their pastoral leadership team, should determine when and how Confirmation and First Communions may be scheduled and celebrated to ensure full compliance with all the provisions of Phase Three. All those who receive First Communion and Confirmation during the time of postponement must do so before December 31, 2020.

3. In order to comply with restricted capacity and social distancing, it is recommended that a limited number of those to receive Confirmation and First Communion be scheduled during Sunday Masses or other designated times until all have celebrated the Sacraments. (See Phase 3, "Before Mass," number 2 above).

4. Catechetical programs for those scheduled to receive Confirmation and First Communion the following year should commence at the usual time respecting and complying with any provisions in effect at that time.

WEDDINGS

Weddings postponed by the directive of March 25, 2020 and can only be scheduled once Phase Three has commenced.

Weddings should be celebrated with full compliance with all the provisions of Phase Three.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (paragraphs 26-30) envisions exceptional circumstances when the normal celebration of initiation at the Easter Vigil may not take place.

During the time of delay, it is crucial that catechists, sponsors and godparents remain in contact with the catechumens and candidates.

Accordingly, when Phase Three begins, and adhering to all Phase Three provisions, the following applies:

1. At least one Scrutiny should be celebrated, either at Sunday Mass or at another time when convenient.
2. The Rites of Initiation are to be celebrated in their entirety according to RCIA, 220 ff.
3. It is not permitted to separate the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism - Confirmation - First Eucharist) for catechumens (elect) being fully initiated.
4. The celebration of full initiation must occur at Mass on a Sunday (or Saturday evening). The Mass of the occurring Sunday is to be used. During Ordinary Time, but not on a Solemnity (e.g. The Most Holy Trinity or The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ), the Ritual Mass "Christian Initiation: Baptism" with its appropriate readings may be used.
5. The Lucernarium (the blessing of the fire and preparation of candle) and Liturgy of the Word of the Easter Vigil are unique to the Vigil and are not to be celebrated outside of the Easter Vigil itself.

Pentecost and Initiation

If Phase Three has begun, an appropriate day to celebrate the full initiation of catechumens (who have celebrated the Rite of Election) outside the Easter Vigil is the Vigil of Pentecost with the extended Vigil readings. (See *Lectionary for Mass*, #62)

Confirmation of Adult Catholics

The delegation for pastors to confirm adult (18+) Catholics baptized as children is extended for two months after the resumption of public worship, even if this is beyond the end of the Easter Season.

For the year 2020 only, Cardinal Tobin hereby grants delegation to pastors to confirm adult baptized Catholics (18+), without recourse to the Regional Vicars during a Sunday (Saturday evening) celebration of the Eucharist.

Reception Into Full Communion

When Phase Three begins, priests may celebrate the “Reception Into Full Communion” at any appropriate time during the year, preferably on a Sunday, according to RCIA, 487. Delegation to confirm is not required.

Note that the “Confirmation of Adult Catholics” and the “Reception Into Full Communion” should not be done at the same liturgical celebration as the full initiation of the catechumens.

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Due to the pandemic, the requirement for a full year catechumenate may be shortened for 2021 only. The Rite of Acceptance should be celebrated as soon as possible after public worship resumes, but at least six months before Easter, 2021.

CONCLUSION

Again, we thank you for all that you have done in your parishes to pray with and unite your parish communities. Everyone has done an extraordinary job in continuing ministry along with your pastoral ministers in reaching out to keep prayerful communication with so many.

Any questions regarding these directives should be directed to the Worship Office.

Rev. Thomas Dente Email: rev.thomas.dente@rcan.org

Rev. Armand Mantia Email: rev.armand.mantia@rcan.org