



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* PROVIDENCE



Returning to Mass in time of COVID-19

“We don't know the details of the future, but we know that our lives will not end in emptiness and frustration ... Because we have hope, we live differently. Because of our hope, we will learn from the past, and will embrace the future with a renewed confidence and a joyful, invincible spirit.”

—Most Rev. Thomas J. Tobin, D.D., Bishop of Providence

The advent of the novel coronavirus has marked our community substantially over the past two months. Whether directly succumbing to the disease it causes, or experiencing its far-reaching economic and emotional effects, all of us have been affected in some way. In an effort to protect the health and safety of our local communities, especially vulnerable populations, Bishop Tobin suspended the public celebration of Mass in March. This was a painful, but necessary decision in view of the common good. As the state begins its phased approach to re-open sectors of our community, the public celebration of Mass will resume on **May 30, 2020**, the Vigil of the Solemnity of Pentecost. This is a joyous moment for our local Church as we gather again as the Body of Christ. Resuming the public celebration of Mass will look differently than before, given the recommendations of health experts. The following points highlight some of these changes.

1. Catholics will continue to be dispensed from Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses

While public Masses will resume, vulnerable populations, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions are asked to follow the most up to date health regulations and remain at home. There are many who might feel uncomfortable returning to Mass. They, too, have legitimate reason to remain at home. Bishop Tobin has extended the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses until further notice.

2. Access to Mass will be limited

In order to prevent risk of infection, attendance at Mass will be limited to a percentage of the church's capacity as specified in the fire code. Some parishes will request a "reservation" or ticket system, or find ways to split up parishioners alphabetically in as equitable a manner as possible.

3. Hand hygiene and masks are key

Parishioners will be expected to sanitize their hands immediately upon entry to the church. Likewise, they must wear a mask at all times, with the exception of receiving Holy Communion.

4. Pews will be sectioned off

In order to maintain six feet distance between parishioners, parishes will mark off sections of pews where parishioners can safely sit.

5. Singing will be limited

Because of the risk of infection due to increased aerosolized particles, singing must be limited. Hymnals will be removed from churches.

6. Parishioners will receive Holy Communion in a safe manner

Parishioners will take off their masks to receive Holy Communion, but the priest or other minister may wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion. The priest or other minister will always sanitize his hands before this time, and whenever he accidentally comes into contact with a person. Parishioners are encouraged to receive Holy Communion on the hand; but another option would be to refrain from receiving Holy Communion and make an act of spiritual communion instead.

7. The church will be sanitized after every Mass

To ensure everyone's safety, parish staff or volunteers will sanitize commonly touched surfaces and pews before and after every celebration of Mass.

8. Budget envelopes will be submitted prior to Mass or as you leave

Instead of "passing the basket," a secure receptacle should be available so parishioners can drop off their budget envelopes before or after Mass.

9. Avoid personal contact with anyone

The sign of peace remains suspended; physical contact must be avoided at all costs.

10. Those who are sick must stay home

Anyone who has symptoms of any sickness (even mild symptoms) may not attend the public celebration of Mass.

