



DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

PHASE TWO: REOPENING OF CHURCHES FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

DIOCESAN DIRECTIVES

Updated as of September 24, 2020

In an effort to provide some further clarity and/or updates to specific protocols, the diocese is releasing this document to supplement the original guidelines and directives as issued on May 7, 2020. While the bulk of the directives from the May document remain in effect, some protocols have been adjusted and refined based on the experiences of these last four months. Bishop Brennan and diocesan administration remain grateful to all the clergy, parish staff members, volunteers and parishioners who have been diligent about following these directives for the health and safety of all who gather for public worship. Moreover, the diocese has encouraged all parish communities to restore their full liturgical schedule of weekend Masses, daily Masses and other sacramental celebrations as existed prior to March 2020. Bishop Brennan continues to invite those who are physically able and healthy to resume attending Mass in person, if they have not already done so – to hear God’s Word with their brothers and sisters in the faith and to receive the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist.

*At each celebration of Mass, the names and contact information for all parishioners and visitors who are in attendance should continue to be recorded in case this information is needed for contact tracing. Moreover, hand sanitizer should be available at all entrances of the church and parishioners should be reminded to sanitize their hands upon entering the church.

*The requirement for all of the faithful to wear a mask (except children under the age of 2 or anyone who has trouble breathing), which covers both the mouth and the nose, remains in effect. As parishioners enter the church, their mask should be put on and remain on until they leave the building while also observing physical distancing.

*Strict physical distancing is still to be followed by only using every other pew and maintaining a 6-foot distance between individuals from different households; thus members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and may be seated together in the same row. Therefore, the limited capacity of a particular church will be determined by the adherence to these protocols and the overall goal of ensuring that our people can attend Mass in a safe manner that strives to promote good health for all.

*Outdoor celebrations of the Mass may occur, as weather permits, provided that all of the same guidelines are followed as would be required for indoor celebrations (physical distancing, wearing of masks, etc...)

*Any distribution of printed materials such as worship aides or bulletins is to be undertaken with care – if possible, individuals are to carefully pick up these items from a table as they enter/leave the church. If these items must be distributed by a volunteer or usher, he/she should wear gloves for the distribution of these materials.

*At the discretion of the local pastor, altar servers may now be utilized to assist during Mass as needed. At this time, it is suggested to utilize only a minimal number of servers per Mass (it is recommended to use no more than three servers). Physical distancing should be maintained as much as possible.

*The readings may be proclaimed by the Presider or by one lector. If the lector is reading from the ambo, the Presider should proclaim the gospel and offer his homily from another location such as the presider's chair so as not to use the same microphone as the lector. The cantor leads the Responsorial Psalm from a separate microphone and stand, not at the ambo. As well, care should be taken that separate copies of the readings are available to prevent multiple people from touching the same liturgical books.

*Matters relating to music during Mass and singing are addressed in a separate document entitled: "Guidelines for Music during Liturgical Celebrations;" this document is being released by the diocese at the same time as these directives.

*The Entrance Procession (and Recessional) may now return to past practices prior to the start of the pandemic.

*If attendance at particular Masses is increasing and the space/setup of the church building allows, pastors may wish to add an additional station where a deacon or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may also distribute communion. Like the priest, this individual must wear a mask and sanitize his/her hands before and after distributing Holy Communion. The same setup, involving a small table with a corporal, purificator, and a hand disinfecting product, must be used at this additional station. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the laity is still suppressed until further notice. Proper physical distancing must be maintained at all times as the faithful come up to receive Holy Communion and then return to their respective pews. It is still recommended to have ushers/volunteers assist with directing the flow of the communion procession.

*Hospitality ministers/ushers should continue to take an active role to ensure physical distancing is maintained as people are dismissed following the conclusion of the Mass.

*At the discretion of the local pastor, churches may continue to be open for private prayer throughout the day without having a designated person always present. Wipes and sanitizing supplies should be available for individuals to sanitize the pew, door handles, etc. once they are finished making their visit and are preparing to leave the church. The hours the church is open should still be limited (not 24 hours a day); as well, regular sanitization of all commonly touched surfaces should be done daily after the closing and before the opening of the church for the next day.

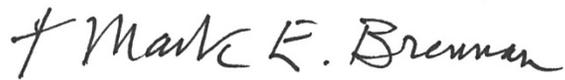
*For the celebration of Funeral Masses, all of the requirements for the public celebration of a Mass should continue to be followed. It is recommended to have a parish staff member or a trained volunteer present for Funeral Masses, in order to assist in the adherence to all of the proper protocols especially when visitors are present who may not be familiar with these guidelines.

*Just as for funeral Masses, the same standard requirements remain in effect for weddings. Those gathered for wedding rehearsals should wear masks at all times and an overview of the protocols should be explained by the local pastor during the rehearsal as there may be many guests who are not familiar with specific parish directives. For the actual wedding ceremony, the pastor may make a determination based on factors such as the size of the worship space and the placement of the bride/groom and the wedding party as to when, if at all, masks may be removed for certain moments during the celebration of the Wedding liturgy.

*Clergy or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may take communion to the sick/homebound but to only one household at a time so as not to spread potential germs from house to house. The clergy member or Extraordinary Minister should practice all sanitizing measures before and after the visit and wear a mask at all times; the communicant should also sanitize accordingly and wear a mask except at the moment of receiving Holy Communion. As weather permits, it is advisable for the visit to be brief and to occur outside on a porch, in the driveway or directly at the front door if possible.

*Confirmation – The Office of Worship and Sacraments has made available additional guidelines for the celebration of Confirmation during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Our parishes and communities need to be vigilant in adhering to all of the protocols for the good and safety of everyone so that our churches may remain open for public worship. When broadcasting services or posting pictures on the internet, social media or other means, we must demonstrate our adherence to all of the guidelines so that our actions match our directives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'B'. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Bishop Mark E. Brennan