



## **Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston**

### **Plan for safely resuming Masses at the beginning of Phase One**

Governor Baker announced on Monday, May 18, that houses of worship can resume services, within the guidelines he has issued.

#### **When can we start Masses?**

If a parish within the Archdiocese of Boston, after careful and deliberate preparation, considers that they are able to meet all of the State, Municipal, and Archdiocesan guidelines (given below), they may request permission from their Regional Bishop or Episcopal Vicar to begin Masses as early as Saturday evening, May 23. The Regional Bishop or Episcopal Vicar should grant that permission only if he is convinced that the parish can in fact comply with all of the guidelines.

Many, or even most, parishes may well need more time to prepare, and may choose Sunday, May 31 (the Feast of Pentecost), as the date for their reopening.

Parishes should not resume Masses before they are ready, and the decision to delay the resumption of Masses until May 31 may very well be the best decision for a parish.

No matter what the start date, no parish should have Mass unless they can do it safely, and in compliance with the guidelines.

Please note: **SOME COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING THE CITIES OF BOSTON AND SOMERVILLE, MAY HAVE LOCAL MUNICIPAL ORDERS THAT ARE STRICTER THAN THOSE OF THE STATE, AND THOSE MUST BE RESPECTED.**

Daily Masses and Funerals can resume on Monday, May 25. Both daily Masses and Funerals will need to comply with the same social distancing and safety guidelines as Sunday Masses do, including the wearing of masks.

Shrines and chapels within the Archdiocese fall within these same guidelines.

### **Who should come to Mass?**

The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will continue for the foreseeable future.

Cardinal Sean strongly encourages people in vulnerable populations, especially the elderly and those with complicating physical conditions, to continue to watch Mass from their homes, on their parish's social media or on CatholicTV.

Parishes need to have a way of limiting the number of people who come into the church. A viable option may be to make use of a registration package like SignUpGenius or EventBrite. Signing up by phone or email should also be an option. A document will be forthcoming very soon that describes those options. No matter what option a parish chooses, the pastor must be able to ensure that the size of the congregation in the church is **not more than 40% of capacity and not more than the church can fit with social distancing maintained.**

If a parish learns that a person who has come to Mass has tested positive for COVID-19, it must notify the Local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town in which the church is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to trace likely contacts and advise contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.

Every parish is encouraged to continue the streaming of their Masses, in order to maintain a relationship with those who are not yet ready to return to Mass.

### **How do we get ready?**

Every parish is encouraged to form a small committee to help to guide the parish through the restart process, and to ensure that all of the criteria, including the check-boxes on the "Places of Worship – MA Safety Department", are met. Pastors should be sure that that committee has credible, professional, and

cautious people on it to help the parish through this transition. In addition to the state check list, there is a check list at the end of this document which may be helpful to the committee.

Right away, and before resuming Masses, parishes should indicate appropriate seating where individuals or families can sit and yet maintain social distancing. The church cannot be filled to any greater than 40% of its posted capacity as an absolute upper limit, but most churches may find that they cannot fit that many people in and still maintain social distancing. Signs should be posted to help people to sit in the right places. No person or household should sit closer than six feet to any other person or household, even if that means using every third pew rather than every other pew.

In multi-church collaboratives or parishes, a pastor may decide to focus only on one church for now, in order to increase the attention on safety.

Parishes may decide that in order to provide for all of their parishioners who want to come to Mass, more Masses should be added on the weekend. That being said, sufficient time is needed to clean the church between Masses.

The Office of Risk Management of the Archdiocese will send out a document very soon on how to clean and disinfect the church adequately, both between the Masses and on a regular basis.

The church needs to be deeply cleaned before the resumption of Masses, in accordance with the methods in the Office of Risk Management document.

In order to provide that ample opportunity for cleaning the church building between the Masses, pastors should consider ways in which the parish can celebrate Mass in a shorter time frame, while maintaining reverence.

A corps of volunteers should be formed and trained to help to direct the flow of people into and out of the church, and to clean the church between the Masses.

All hymnals and missalettes need to be removed from the church.

Holy water fonts will remain empty. In order to discourage the habitual reaction on the part of parishioners to put their fingers in the fonts, a simple and respectful covering could be devised for the fonts.

Arrows should be placed on the floors indicating the direction of traffic flow, so as to assure one-way movement.

In places in which people have to stand in line, tape should be placed on the floor to mark out six foot distances.

Signs should be placed inside and outside of the church reminding people of the need to wear masks and to maintain social distancing.

Bathrooms should be clean and accessible, and soap plentiful.

A plan should be developed and explained for safe restroom use. That plan will look different for each parish.

Proper ventilation should be ensured. It may be that opening doors or windows makes sense.

Each priest and deacon should have a set of vestments which will be worn only by him, stored separately, and laundered frequently.

### **What guidelines do parishioners need to observe while in church?**

If parishioners can bring their own bottle of hand sanitizer to the church, they should. Otherwise, they can use sanitizer provided by the parish and positioned at the entry to the church.

All members of the congregation need to wear masks, with a few exceptions:

- Children under the age of two should not wear masks.
- Parents should judge for children between the ages of two and five whether they should wear a mask.
- All people who claim an exemption because of health can forego wearing a mask. They do not have to provide documentation.
- The priest and others with him in the sanctuary do not need to wear masks in the sanctuary as long as strict socially distancing is maintained. They do have to wear masks when assisting with the distribution of Holy Communion.

With reasonable exceptions allowed, there should be no public access to the sacristy while the church is open.

There will be no social gatherings either before or after Mass.

### **What do we need to do during the Mass to keep it safe?**

There should be no processions at the Masses, including no offertory processions.

There should be no altar servers.

Choirs will not be allowed.

Congregational singing will not be allowed in these early days. Fully respectful of the very important role that music plays in our liturgies, and also respectful of the public health concerns, the congregation should be instructed not to sing, either by announcement or by signs. There can be a cantor and an instrumentalist, who would provide music during the Mass (perhaps limited to the psalm, the Mass parts, and a song at Communion).

Masses can have a priest, a deacon, a lector, an instrumentalist, a cantor, and whatever volunteers are necessary to ensure the safe flow of people. If there are to be two communion stations (only in a large church), an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist could be used if there is no deacon.

Any priest, deacon, lector, or volunteer who has a respiratory infection of any kind should not attend Mass.

In the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the lector must respect strict social distancing. They should not wear masks in the sanctuary.

There must be no passing of the basket for the offertory. Instead, a basket could be present at the main entrance and people could put their offering into it on their own. **Parishes should promote the use of “Ninety Days Now for your Parish” as a way of helping parishioners to get started with online giving or use their local online giving solution if that is already set up.**

During the consecration, hosts to be distributed should be placed on a second corporal to the side, so that they are not directly in front of the priest.

There should be no holding of hands during the Our Father.

There should be no invitation to participate in a sign of peace.

For the distribution of Holy Communion:

- There will be either one or two communion stations, depending on the size of the Church.
- It should be announced that parishioners may well decide not to receive Holy Communion if they feel the risk is too high, and that decision will be honored and respected.
- There will be no distribution of the Precious Blood.
- The communicants and the priest will wear masks.
- Neither the priest nor the communicants should wear gloves during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- Congregants who are not coming forward to receive Holy Communion or a blessing should still get out of their pews at the beginning, so that no one will have to climb over anyone else.
- The priest will have a table next to him with hand sanitizer.
- The priest will hold the consecrated host over the communicants' outstretched hands and drop the host into their hands without touching their hands.
- Communicants will receive the consecrated host in their hands, step to the side, lower their mask, consume the host, replace their mask, and return to their pew.
- In the case of unintentional contact, the priest will sanitize his own hands immediately.
- If the priest himself is a member of a vulnerable population, a deacon or a trained lay minister should distribute communion.
- The people should return to their pews by a different route, to avoid contact with approaching people.
- There will be tape on the floor to show where to stand as a communicant approaches to receive communion. There also will be tape on the floor to show where to stand to demask and consume the host, and arrows showing how to return to the pews.

- There should be a couple of minutes after Communion for silent prayer, before the final prayer and dismissal.

Participants at Mass would be encouraged to leave the church within a couple of minutes of the end of the Mass so as to allow for time for cleaning the church before the next Mass. Row by row exiting, directed by the trained volunteers, is encouraged.

**If a Parish cannot offer Mass safely, following these guidelines and all of the checkboxes on the State document, they should not offer Mass.**

**The Vicars Forane will have regular conversations with the Pastors and will report regularly to the Vicar General with regard to compliance.**

**Check List: What needs to be in place before we start to have Mass?**

- ✓ Church deeply cleaned, according to methods outlined in the Risk Management document
- ✓ Hymnals and missalettes removed
- ✓ Volunteers in place to assist with traffic flow
- ✓ Signs clearly posted, letting people know:
  - That they must wear masks
  - Where they can sit
  - No congregational singing
- ✓ Socially distant seating marked out
- ✓ Hand sanitizer available
- ✓ Holy water fonts empty
- ✓ Markers on the floor indicating the direction of traffic flow and spacing off six feet in places where people might be in lines
- ✓ Some method in place to restrict the number of people who enter the church to below 40% capacity, and no more than the number of socially distanced seats available
- ✓ Plan and volunteers and materials in place to clean church between Masses
- ✓ Permission of Regional Bishop or Episcopal Vicar if starting Mass before May 31