



Roman Catholic

# Diocese of Tucson

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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## Reopening our Parishes for Public Worship

The Roman Catholic Church has a long theological tradition of committed work to ensure *the common good*, experienced at present by sheltering at home and social distancing. In these ways faithful Catholics have had a positive impact on the common good, reflecting the love of neighbor in a unique and meaningful way. Nevertheless, the cessation of public worship has been stressful and disheartening for many of us and we are understandably anxious to return to public worship.

### **Reopening of Parishes for receiving Holy Communion only on Ascension**

I have agreed to implement a gradual reopening of our parishes for public worship after consultation with numerous persons in leadership roles in the Tucson Diocese, along with attention given to the medical and scientific community. Because the situation remains highly fluid our reopening of parishes also will be marked by adaptations along the way. Most especially, if at any time that we see an intensity in Coronavirus contagion, an overwhelming of our healthcare facilities, or other factors that advise a change to our plans, then be assured that we will do so. Indeed, this could include returning to the state of closing our churches to public worship once again. We will not let our love for the practice of our faith overcome our call to be faithful citizens attentive to the common good.

With all this in mind, I am permitting individual pastors, at their discretion, to provide the faithful with Holy Communion beginning with the weekend of May 23/24, the celebration of the Ascension of the Lord. There will be no public Masses at that time. However, Holy Communion may be distributed outdoors, typically following a Mass celebrated privately (without a congregation or participants) by the pastor. Parishioners might also view a Mass on television or via internet prior to receiving Holy Communion at their parish. You will need to check your local parish's web site or Facebook page to determine if this will take place at your parish and how the local protocol to receive Holy Communion will be provided.

### **The Sunday Mass Obligation Suspended**

Roman Catholic theology teaches that we do not ordinarily separate reception of Holy Communion from the celebration of Mass. While receiving Eucharist after a Mass viewed through technology is an imperfect situation, it is for now the best. It is especially critical that all Catholics be reminded that there is some inherent risk for anyone going to any public place, including a church. The decision to return to the public celebrations of our faith during this time of pandemic should not be made casually or lightly by anyone.

The Sunday Mass obligation has been suspended indefinitely for all Catholics living in or visiting the Tucson Diocese. No one is required to return to receive Holy Communion or return to in-person Masses at this time. Those age 65 or older, as well as anyone with a chronic health condition, are strongly urged to remain at home and not come onto church premises. This is a time when such persons should let the church come to them in perhaps a secondary but still meaningful way—via the internet, television, and

other means of technology. Likewise, anyone feeling ill in any way is urged, in the strongest sense, to remain at home and not risk accidental harm to the community gathered at church or other public places.

### **Public Mass as early as Pentecost**

Beginning with the following weekend (May 29-June 1), with the celebration of Pentecost, pastors may petition the Bishop for permission to begin limited public celebrations of the Mass. Please note, parishes will not automatically open on any particular day. Rather, each pastor must certify to his parishioners and to the bishop that basic safety protocols will be in place before their particular parish opens to the public. Those protocols pertain to social distancing (outdoors and indoors) at our churches, limitations on numbers present for a Mass, proper cleaning of church facilities, the use of face masks, hand sanitizers, certain ways in which the Mass may/may not be celebrated, and a host of other factors. To achieve this goal many parishes will schedule additional Masses.

### **Weekend Masses extended from Friday through Monday**

For this reason I am allowing weekend Masses to begin on Friday and extend through Monday. There are to be no public celebrations of any kind on Tuesday through Thursday to allow for additional cleaning as well as three days' time for any indication of the Coronavirus to die. Pastors also might call forth special ministers from the non-vulnerable population or undertake other special means to lessen the risk for contagion at our churches. Outdoor Masses remain preferable at this time as well as parking-lot Masses (but with the reception of Holy Communion beginning on Ascension). Catholics likewise are urged to graciously and politely leave, should they approach a church and find a "church is now full" sign at the entrance. Once a church is certified for public liturgies, weddings and funerals may once again be celebrated for larger communities but strictly following all protocols given for weekend liturgies.

It is my hope that in this gradual opening of our parishes we will be attentive to our great desire to continue the full exercise of our faith as well as undertake reasonable effort to ensure the well-being of our people and the common good. I call upon Catholics to be especially attentive to their pastors as they work with parish leadership to institute these critical protocols. I also call upon faithful Catholics and all persons of good will to join me in prayers for an end to the pandemic as well as charitable endeavors for all those harmed by the virus, unemployment, or other factors.

May God bless you abundantly.

+Edward J. Weisenburger  
Bishop of Tucson