



DIOCESE OF  
Jefferson City

BETTER  
TOGETHER

# “SEE HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

*The Church in a pandemic*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As we continue our efforts to protect one another from the serious effects of the coronavirus, these FAQs are offered to assist the faithful in understanding the instructions and decrees promulgated by Bishop W. Shawn McKnight. The diocesan decrees and instructions give the faithful a means to continue the life of the Church in all its facets – the celebration of the sacraments, works of charity and mercy, and formation – while assisting civic officials in promoting the health and well-being of all.

More information, including the official decrees and instructions, is available at [diojeffcity.org/public-health](http://diojeffcity.org/public-health).

### **WHEN CAN WE GO BACK TO MASS LIKE NORMAL IN OUR PARISH?**

Public Masses for many parishes in the Diocese of Jefferson City have resumed. However, if a city or county ordinance restricts or limits church services in person, or if a parish is unable to meet the health safety requirements set for by national, state and county authorities or the instructions provided by the diocese, they may not be providing public Masses.

In short, it will take time for things to “get back to normal.” Important safety measures will be required in order to help protect congregants from infection and slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

### **ARE THERE CERTAIN PEOPLE WHO SHOULD NOT COME TO MASS?**

Anyone who is ill, symptomatic or been exposed to someone else with the coronavirus within 14 days cannot enter the church. This includes all clergy and laity and is in accord with national, state and local health directives.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention provides a thorough list of people who are at higher risk of a severe illness: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html>. Please consider reviewing it as you decide how to return to public gatherings.

### **AND IF I CAN'T ATTEND MASS AT MY PARISH FOR SOME REASON, SUCH AS LIMITS ON THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING OR OTHER RESTRICTIONS, CAN I ATTEND MASS AT ANOTHER PARISH?**

In our efforts to keep one another safe and healthy, it's recommended you consider participating in a Mass being livestreamed, rather than going to another parish in person. You can find a list of local parishes livestreaming Masses on the diocesan website, [diojeffcity.org](http://diojeffcity.org).

### **IT'S JUST NOT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO COME TO MASS OR I DON'T FEEL SAFE IN GOING OUT RIGHT NOW. WHAT CAN I DO?**

Bishop McKnight has dispensed all the faithful from the obligation of the Easter Duty and the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday or a holy day of obligation through Sept. 11, 2020. Parishes are being encouraged to continue livestreaming Masses, including daily Mass, to allow parishioners to maintain a spiritual connection with their local church.

If you are a lay minister and are concerned about participating in public Masses in that role, whether as a lector, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, choir member, hospitality minister, etc., please let your pastor or coordinator know that you should be excused from serving until you are ready to return.

### **WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT WHEN WE COME TO MASS AT OUR PARISH?**

First, anyone who is ill, symptomatic or been exposed to someone else with the coronavirus within 14 days cannot enter the church. This includes all clergy and laity and is in accord with national, state and local health directives. We also ask everyone to check their temperature at home before deciding if you are coming to Mass. You can find the current symptoms of the coronavirus at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

Bishop McKnight has instructed parishes to ensure all pews are wiped down with disinfectant, all hymnals and missalettes are removed and all surfaces used frequently (restroom facilities, door handles, etc.) are sanitized before each service. Everyone attending Mass or other public gatherings at our parishes and other entities is highly encouraged to wear a mask or other facial covering. The only exception during Mass is when we are in the pew and when receiving Holy Communion.

You may be asked to observe social distancing – staying at least six feet from people not in your household, except while receiving Holy Communion (more on that below). In other words, only people who live together in one house should be together in the pew, but stay away from other households. Please follow the guidance given to you at your parish. You'll find the holy water fonts empty and hand sanitizers available.

When you arrive at church, please follow the instructions provided regarding through which doors to use to enter and leave, where to sit and how much distance to maintain when you receive Holy Communion. Some parishes may have to limit attendance in order to assure compliance with public safety guidelines.

You'll notice there will be no offertory procession, no sign of peace and no passing of the collection basket. You can drop your donation into a stationary basket, or continue to use the online or ACH opportunities provided by your parish.

### **CAN WE RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION, THEN?**

Yes, but only the Most Precious Body.

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 shall be placed six feet apart in the aisles in which the congregation approaches the sanctuary for Holy Communion, to facilitate proper social distancing.

Communion ministers must be masked, sanitize their hands using sanitizer immediately before and after distributing Holy Communion (allowing the sanitizer to dry thoroughly), and when at all possible, to utilize a disinfectant wipe or purificator dipped in a sanitizing solution (at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol) to sanitize their fingers when incidental contact is made with the communicant.

When approaching the Communion minister, if you are wearing a face mask, pull your mask below your chin and present one hand resting on the palm of the other. After responding "Amen," the communicant reverently places the Eucharist in his or her mouth and immediately replaces their mask.

Those who persist in their desire to receive Holy Communion on the tongue may do so but only after those who receive Holy Communion in the hand, or in a Communion line designated solely for Holy Communion on the tongue. Communion ministers must purify and then sanitize their fingers after distributing Holy Communion on the tongue to each household.

### **I'M IN THE CHOIR OR A LECTOR. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

All lay ministers are obliged to wear masks or other facial coverings as much as possible. However, just like the clergy, you should remove your mask or facial covering when you are in the sanctuary area and when you are six feet apart.

### **WHEN SHOULD CHILDREN WEAR MASKS?**

Parents should determine when a child is old enough to attend Mass and can abide by the safety guidelines. The CDC guidelines state: 'Everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they have to go out in public, for example to the grocery store or to pick up other necessities. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance' (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>).

### WHAT ABOUT OTHER CELEBRATIONS, SUCH AS FIRST COMMUNIONS, CONFIRMATIONS, WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, ETC.?

Your pastor, administrator or parish life collaborator has been given authority to schedule these – unless the local authorities are restricting public worship services – in keeping with the requirements of public safety.

### CAN WE RESUME OTHER MEETINGS AND EVENTS, INCLUDING SOCIAL EVENTS AND SPORTS?

Your pastor, administrator or parish life collaborator has been given authority to allow meetings. It's recommended the observance of social distancing, the use of face masks, and all other public health recommendations of state authorities should be followed whenever possible, as deemed by your parish leadership. Conferencing by telephone or Internet is another option being used by many parishes.

### WHAT ABOUT OUR EMPLOYEES AND REGULAR VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE STAFFING OUR PARISHES AND PROGRAMS?

The Center for Disease Control offers these general guidelines for us to keep ourselves and each other healthy:

- ▶ If you feel sick, you should stay home.
- ▶ Continue to practice good hygiene, including:
  - Washing hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid touching your face.
  - Sneezing or coughing into a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- ▶ Avoid socializing in groups that do not allow for appropriate social distancing.
- ▶ Minimize travel to the extent possible.

Here are the guidelines the employees of the diocesan Chancery are expected to follow:

*All employees are expected to work in the office with the exception of individuals who feel uncomfortable doing so and identify as "vulnerable individuals" or "immuno-compromised". These individuals will be expected to work as much as possible through tele-work. While at work, employees will be expected to maintain social distancing (6 feet from others) and if unable to do so, a mask and frequent handwashing is required.*

**Vulnerable individuals include:**

- I. Employees age 60 and over
- II. Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised.

This includes:

- a. Individuals with organ and blood cancers
- b. Individuals undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy for cancer
- c. Individuals taking medications that treat autoimmune diseases, i.e., corticosteroids, cyclosporine, methotrexate, azathioprine and biological therapies such as rituximab and etanercept, to name a few
- d. Individuals with infections such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, measles, herpes, chickenpox
- e. Individuals with chronic diseases like diabetes type 1 or type 2, kidney failure, liver cirrhosis, and liver failure
- f. Individuals suffering from malnutrition
- g. Individuals with autoimmune conditions such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis
- h. Individuals with extensive burns
- i. Individuals having exposure to environmental toxins like radiation
- j. Individuals having no spleen
- k. Individuals who are pregnant

**WHAT IF SOMEONE I KNOW NEEDS HELP BECAUSE THEY'VE LOST THEIR JOB OR INCOME, OR FOR OTHER REASONS?**

Please contact your parish to find out what resources are there. Every parish has been encouraged to establish a disaster response team to assist people affected by the pandemic. You can also suggest the person contact Catholic Charities. There is a simple online form they can use, available at <https://ccnmo.diojeffcity.org/covid-19-coronavirus-relief-request/>.

**WHEN IS THIS ALL GOING TO END?**

Only God knows. If at any time, a legitimate county or state authority resumes a stay-at-home order, “the public celebrations of Mass, liturgies or devotions shall again be expressly forbidden for as long as the legitimate governmental authority determines,” the bishop stated in his decree.

Whenever public celebrations of the Mass and other liturgies and devotions are suspended, private celebrations may take place with no more than the number of people allowed by the county health director or legitimate state official, and only in accordance with social-distancing regulations.

For more information about the diocese’s response to COVID-19 and to read Bishop McKnight’s decrees and instructions, visit <https://diojeffcity.org/public-health>.