



Statement for the Restoration of Public Masses within the Diocese of St. Augustine

The Catholic community of the Diocese of St. Augustine has made some big and, yes, painful sacrifices over the past several weeks in order to live out Christ's call to love our neighbor as we have attempted to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, prevent our health care workers from being overwhelmed, and uphold all elements of the common good.

As health restrictions begin to ease in Florida, Bishop Felipe Estévez has approved safety guidelines to provide direction and recommendations for clergy as we progress toward resuming public Mass and the sacraments in our parishes the weekend of May 16-17, and May 18 for weekday Masses. Keep in mind that some parishes in our diocese might not be ready to resume public Masses this weekend because of their unique circumstances.

The safety guidelines and recommendations reflect the most current guidance from civil and public health authorities and are aligned with the bishops of Florida. They will be updated as needed to reflect the guidance from our governmental leaders as we pass through different phases of recovery from the pandemic.

As we resume the celebration of public Mass soon, it is crucial that we approach this next phase with a patient, loving and charitable hearts.

Here are some things you will want to know and can expect:

A general dispensation from Sunday Mass will remain. Bishop Estévez has indefinitely dispensed the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice. Those who are most at risk of serious infection or illness, as well as their caregivers, are strongly encouraged to stay home and participate in live-streamed or televised Masses. The risk of the coronavirus is still very real, and even with the best health practices and strict physical distancing in place, anyone attending public events, such as the Mass, is increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Physical distancing will limit seating availability for Mass. Pastors must abide by state and local laws and restrictions that pertain to physical distancing. This physical distancing will determine how many seats can be made available for Mass in the church or other parish buildings, so pastors will define a fair method for determining how many can attend any one Mass and ensuring the greatest potential for participation. Unfortunately, this may mean that by ensuring everyone has at least some opportunity for attending Mass, no one should expect to be able to attend Mass every Sunday or with guaranteed regularity. It is very important that you are registered with your parish to receive updated information regarding Mass times and who can attend. Please make sure your contact information is current so that you can receive updates through sign-up systems or via the myParish App.

There will be changes from what you are used to at Mass:

- *Masks or suitable face coverings will be required to attend Mass.* To ensure the protection of those around us, the faithful are required to bring with them a mask or suitable face covering in order to attend Mass – parishes will not provide these. The mask or face covering must be worn at all times except at the moment of consuming holy Communion. Due to the cost and availability of hand sanitizers, those attending Mass will be expected to bring their own.
- *Holy Water* stoups will be empty, but you can still make the sign of the cross when entering and exiting the church to remind yourself of your baptismal vows.
- *Seating* will ensure physical distancing. Although families can sit together, separate families and individuals must sit at least 6-feet apart. Your parish will guide you in where to sit.
- *Worship aids and hymnals will be removed and not be available.* Those attending Mass may bring their own missals/missalettes to follow along or devices to access one of the many worship aids available from online sources.
- At the *Offertory*, collection baskets will not be passed. Instead, there will be baskets available in the church where you can place your gift.
- During the *Lord's Prayer*, handholding will not be permitted.
- The *Sign of Peace* will also be different. The presider might omit this altogether. But if the deacon or priest invites you to exchange a sign of peace, a simple bow or nod to those around you will suffice.
- The *Distribution of Communion* will be different too. Holy Communion will only be distributed in the form of the host and will be received in the hand only. Out of care and concern for ministers and communicants, the reception of holy Communion on the tongue is temporarily suspended during this difficult time. The common communion cup of the precious blood will not be shared. Masks or suitable face coverings must be worn while moving to and from Communion; however, they are removed to consume the host. Gloves are not required to attend Mass but, if they are worn, they must be removed to receive Communion in the hand.

Your pastor has been provided substantial *guidelines* to inform his decision making with regard to the Mass and the sacraments. Each pastor must determine for his parish the schedules, policies and protocols that will work best. For more information on how this will work at your parish, please contact your pastor or parish office.

Thank you for your patience through all of this. Please continue to pray for our diocese, our parishes and schools and our local communities as we navigate this next phase of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approved by
Most Rev. Felipe J. Estevez
Bishop of St. Augustine
May 4, 2020

