

Planning for the Future:

What to Expect When Public Masses Resume

With the national and statewide conversation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic now focused on “reopening” businesses, many people in the Diocese of Buffalo are wondering when the suspension of public Masses will be lifted. The diocese encompasses two regional councils — Western New York and the Finger Lakes, because of this, it is necessitates that any plans be implemented locally by vicariates and parish leaders, in accordance with all federal, state, and local civil directives.

We are thankful for the technology that has kept parishes connected, however, the Diocese of Buffalo fully recognizes the faithful’s strong desire to return to parishes and to receive the Eucharist – which is our Spiritual life-blood.

While the specifics of “when” and “how” public Masses will resume are still being determined, these directives will be important to consider for parish staff and parishioners:

1. The general dispensation from Sunday Mass obligation will remain in place.

Regardless of when restrictions are lifted in a specific region in the Diocese of Buffalo, Catholics will continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays, in particular those who are most vulnerable or at-risk groups who will feel it is safer to stay home than attend Mass. The faithful are encouraged to keep the Sabbath holy by participating in a parish livestream Mass or utilizing Catholic Television.

2. Mandated and temporary Liturgical changes will be in place.

Like dioceses across the country, there will be guidelines established once individual church will be allowed to begin worship again. The goal of these regulation is to maintain the integrity of the liturgy, while addressing the current needs of the wider community in the interest of public health and safety.

3. Live-streaming should continue due to attendance limitations.

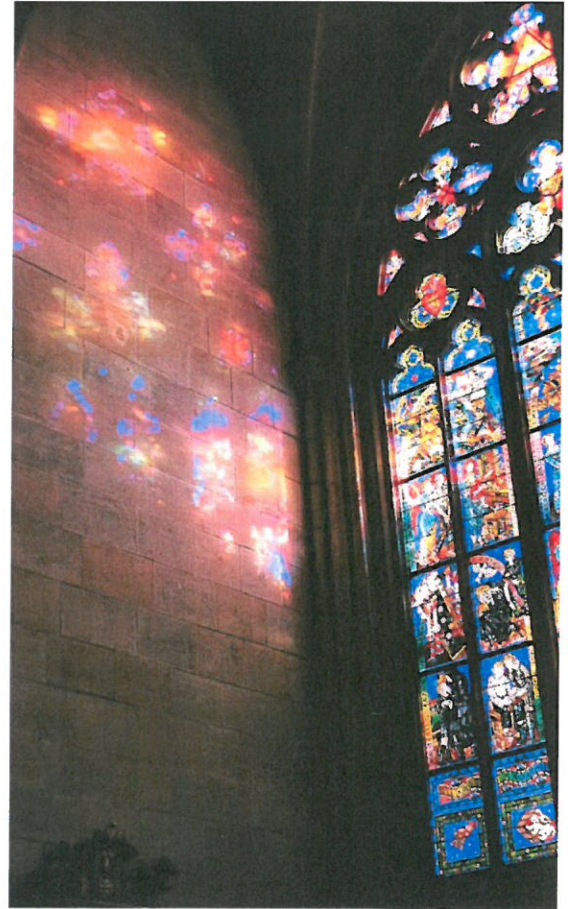
No one should expect to be able to attend Mass with regularity, so for parishes who are currently live-streaming Masses will be encouraged to continue to doing so.

4. Social distancing will continue to be maintained.

The recommended social distancing guideline of six feet will need to be respected when entering and leaving a church, as well as in regards to seating and a potential Communion procession. Parishioners would be required to wear a mask and anyone who is showing any symptoms of sickness will be told to stay home. Social gatherings before or after Mass will also not be permitted.

5. Safety concerns, in addition to the virus itself, will determine the timeline going forward.

During Mass on April 28, 2020, Pope Francis prayed for prudence as communities begin lifting their lockdowns. The Holy Father said, "At this time, when we are beginning to receive instructions for coming out of quarantine, we pray that the Lord would give his people – all of us – the grace of prudence and obedience to the instructions so that the pandemic does not return." As this process unfolds, there will certainly be challenges but the safety of our community will remain the benchmark. As the Diocese moves forward it requests that parishioners stay informed and stay flexible to any updates.



By working together, the Diocese of Buffalo is hopeful that people will soon be able to return to our churches, even if in a limited capacity, with the important understanding that things will not immediately be going back to normal.