

Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly
Diocesan Principles for Opening
May 27, 2020

Earlier today the State of Washington issued guidelines for spiritual services under Phase II of the state's reopening plan. It also released additional directives applicable to Phase I. These new guidelines make provision for outdoor services in Phase I and indoor services in Phase II. The last directive that explicitly attended to the concerns of people of faith was issued on May 6th.

Many counties in the Diocese of Spokane have been in Phase II for some time. Until today, Catholics in Phase II counties have seen the reopening of services such as hair salons, pet grooming, and restaurant dining with no indication of forthcoming state direction on religious gatherings. In the absence of state guidelines, the diocese had been working on a plan over the last few weeks in consultation with local health authorities, Providence Health Services, and the other Catholic Bishops in the state. I am pleased that the state plan announced today largely coincides with the plans we had already developed.

I encourage parishes in Phase I counties to take advantage of the provisions made available to them at their current phase of reopening. This may include the celebration of public Mass outdoors while observing the principles below that are applicable to outdoor settings.

Beginning on Saturday evening, May 30th, the Vigil of Pentecost, public indoor Masses are allowed but not required in Phase II counties. Public indoor Masses are only allowed while following these principles:

Obligation

- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in place until further notice. This means that although Sunday Mass is available once again, the dispensation remains for all Catholics throughout the diocese. If you do not attend Sunday Mass, it is not a sin.
- Vulnerable, at risk, or otherwise concerned persons must remain at home.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms or feelings of sickness must remain at home.

Occupancy

- Parishes are permitted to offer Mass up to 25% of possible building occupancy or up to 50, whichever is less.
- A distance of no less than 6 feet must be maintained between households. Churches should be physically arranged or marked to facilitate the maintenance of physical distancing between households.
- Pastors must devise a system to collect the names and contact information of those attending Mass and to keep this record on file for 30 days.
- Please do not congregate before or after Mass.

Sanitation

Maintaining proper distance between parishioners and containing the respiratory droplets from people is essential.

- Parishioners are required to wear face masks whenever they are indoors for Mass, excepting the reception of Holy Communion. A mask is not required if it cannot be worn reliably or if it aggravates breathing difficulty or another health risk.
- Provision for hand sanitizer is mandated.
- Doors to the church should be propped open to increase natural air flow.
- Elop sanitation methods following gatherings.
- Pew missals, envelopes, song books, etc. should be removed.
- Holy water fonts are to remain empty.
- The Sign of Peace is to be omitted.
- Do not pass the collection basket from parishioner to parishioner.
- There is to be no procession/presentation of gifts by the faithful.
- Congregational singing is prohibited.

Abbreviated Time for Gatherings

Limiting the amount of time which people are gathered is recommended by health care experts.

- Homilies should be brief – 3 minutes or less.
- Take advantage of optional shortened bible readings and use of Eucharistic Prayer II.
- Liturgical processions inside church buildings are prohibited. If possible, simply enter and exit from the sacristy.

Holy Communion

- Holy Communion will not be distributed from the Chalice.
- Parishioners are encouraged to receive Holy Communion on a flattened hand.
- Households approaching for Holy Communion should be separated from other households following the six-foot separation guideline.
- If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are necessary, they should be kept to a bare minimum number.
- Wearing gloves and using tongs are not permitted.

As your bishop I am concerned for the spiritual and physical health of all the faithful. If you have any reservations about attending Mass, I ask you to stay home.