

Archdiocese of St. Louis



Restart of Public Masses - 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 promulgated by Archbishop Robert J. Carlson. All official information is available on our website. Please continue to refer to archstl.org/coronavirus for the latest updates—including a condensed version of all directives for parishes—from the Archdiocese of St. Louis regarding COVID-19.

When can we go back to Mass like normal in our parish?

Public Masses, with appropriate social distancing for many parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Louis are set to resume on Monday, May 18, 2020. This date was chosen after discussion with government, health care professionals, and others.

But 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.

What should we expect when we come to Mass at our parish?

First, anyone who is ill, symptomatic, or has been exposed to someone else with the coronavirus within 14 days cannot enter the church. This 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.

Archbishop Carlson has instructed parishes to ensure all pews are wiped down with disinfectant; that all hymnals and missalettes are removed; and that all surfaces used frequently (restroom facilities, door handles, etc.) are sanitized before each service.

Everyone attending Mass is obligated to wear a mask or other facial covering. The only exception during Mass is when we are seated in the pew and when receiving Holy Communion.

You’ll be asked to observe social distancing – staying at least six feet from people not in your household.

You’ll find the holy water fonts are empty and that there is hand sanitizer available.

When you arrive at church, please follow the instructions provided regarding which doors to use to enter and leave, where to sit, and the six-foot distance to maintain when you receive Holy Communion. Be sure to keep at least six feet between your family and others while in the pews.

Some parishes may have to limit attendance 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 in a stationary basket, or continue to use the online or ACH opportunities provided by your parish.

Can we receive Holy Communion?

Yes, but only the Most Precious Body and only by hand. This is in keeping with the advice of state health officials to avoid any possible contact with another person's saliva or particles exhaled from the communicants' mouth onto the ministers' fingers.

For the distribution of Holy 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 immediately before and after distributing Holy Communion, and when at all possible, should 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, the communicant is to pull their mask or other facial covering below their 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 or other facial covering.

And what about coffee and donuts after Mass?

Please leave Mass together as a household, wearing your masks or other facial covering and observing six feet of distance from others. Your pastor and others will not be able to greet you after Mass, and bulletins or other materials should not be distributed after Mass. And no receptions or social gathering following Mass can be held.

I'm in the choir or a lector. What should we do?

Choirs are not allowed to assemble; cantors are acceptable to lead music at mass.

Lectors and all lay ministers are obligated to wear masks and maintain the social distance of six feet as much as possible.

When should children wear masks?

Parents should determine when a child is old enough to attend Mass and can abide by the safety guidelines.

What about other celebrations, such as first Communion, Confirmations, weddings, funerals, etc.?

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

It's just not possible for me to come to Mass. What can I do?

Archbishop Carlson has dispensed all of the faithful from the obligation of Sunday Mass until further notice. Parishes are being encouraged to continue livestreaming Masses, including daily Mass, to allow parishioners to maintain a spiritual connection with their local church.

Can we resume other meetings? Your pastor, parochial administrator, or parish life coordinator has been given authority to allow meetings, as long as the requirements of six-foot social distancing and the wearing of masks or other facial coverings and gloves (or frequent handwashing) can be observed. Conferencing by telephone or Internet is another option being used by many parishes.

Can we plan for social gatherings?

Social gatherings will be allowed as soon as possible. Currently social gatherings are still forbidden to help ensure the health and safety of all parishioners.

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.