



# DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

## PHASE TWO: REOPENING OF CHURCHES FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

### DIOCESAN DIRECTIVES

Updated as of June 10, 2021

**EFFECTIVE SATURDAY, JUNE 19, 2021, AND SUNDAY JUNE 20, 2021**

*As announced on June 2, 2021, Bishops of the Province of Baltimore and the Archdiocese of Washington lifted the dispensation of the Sunday and Holy Days Mass obligation beginning Saturday, June 26, 2021, and Sunday, June 27, 2021. Additionally, the mask mandate in the State of West Virginia is set to expire on June 20, 2021. As such, Bishop Brennan releases these updated directives regarding the celebration of Mass and other liturgical celebrations. With the release of these updated directives, in which some restrictions have been modified or lifted, all are asked to continue to be vigilant and take appropriate measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 especially as new variants have allowed the virus to spread more easily and with greater rapidity. Bishop Brennan and diocesan administration remain grateful to all the clergy, parish staff members, volunteers and parishioners who have been diligent about following these directives for the health and safety of all.*

### GENERAL DIRECTIVES

\*Regarding overall sanitization practices, the most recent CDC findings state that while it is possible for people to become infected if they touch a surface and then touch their nose, mouth or eyes, the risk of infection from touching a surface is now considered to be low. While disinfecting surfaces can help to reduce the risk of infection, the most reliable way to prevent infection from surfaces is to regularly wash hands or use hand sanitizer; thus the use of hand sanitizer is still to be encouraged upon entering and exiting the church. Churches should continue to provide sanitizer to all upon entering. All churches and parish facilities should be cleaned at least one time per day when open to the public; the level and method of cleaning and/or sanitizing at each location should be determined by the building's design and usage as some locations may require more frequent cleaning of surfaces. Churches should have sanitizing wipes available for anyone who wishes to sanitize their space. More extensive disinfecting is necessary in locations where there has been a suspected or confirmed virus case within the last 24 hours.

\*It is expected that all parish communities have now restored their full liturgical schedule of weekend Masses, daily Masses and other sacramental celebrations as existed prior to March 2020. Churches should continue to be open for private prayer throughout the day and are encouraged to resume their pre-pandemic schedule of hours. However, churches may not be open 24 hours a day. As well, parish office hours and many elements of parish life should resume provided the general guidelines are followed.

\*In accordance with state guidelines, the requirement to wear appropriate facial coverings by non-vaccinated parishioners is lifted effective Saturday, June 19, 2021, and Sunday, June 20, 2021. This means that no person entering the church for Mass or other liturgical service will be required to wear a facial covering. As an act of love of neighbor, understanding and respect should be afforded to those members of the faithful who still wish to wear face coverings for personal reasons.

\*Additionally, parish baptismal fonts (those with running water or still, non-moving water) may be filled and used at the discretion of the pastor. Holy Water stoups may also be filled; however, they must be cleaned and disinfected regularly—at least once per week for still water fonts and stoups.

\*Seating: The previous directive mandating strict social distancing (seating faithful in every other pew and six feet apart) and other limitations on church capacity are lifted. Open seating in the church is now permitted. As with mask usage, special consideration should be given to those members of the faithful who wish to remain socially distanced at Mass. Pastors are encouraged to set aside a portion of the seating in the church to accommodate those who prefer to maintain physical distancing – in this section, only every other pew would be utilized and those seated in this section would need to wear masks and remain six-feet apart from others.

\*The tracking of contact information for those attending liturgical services and gatherings is no longer required. In cases where a positive COVID-19 case or exposure is identified within the parish, all parishioners are to be notified as well as the local health department. During the pandemic, some parishes have restricted outside access to their churches in order to “funnel” the faithful into certain primary entrances for the purpose of contact tracing and hand sanitization. This practice is no longer necessary as long as parishes are able to provide sanitizing stations at each entrance.

### **PARTICULAR DIRECTIVES FOR MASS**

\*All ministers participating in the Entrance Procession and/or Recessional are no longer required to be masked and maintain appropriate distancing.

\*Altar servers continue to be permitted to assist during Mass. Altar servers must wash and sanitize their hands before Mass but are not required to wear a face covering. There is no longer a limitation on the number of servers during the Mass or other liturgical service.

\*Multiple lectors are now permitted during the Mass or other liturgical service to proclaim the readings. Additionally, the ambo and microphones may be shared by lectors, cantors, and the celebrant. These areas should be cleaned often—in accord with the regular cleaning of the church.

\*Digital, downloadable worship resources, projection of music and texts and disposable worship aids have proven very effective in some of our parishes and should be continued. However, hymnals, missalettes and other printed resources may again be used by congregants and kept in the pew racks as was done prior to the pandemic.

\*The use of choirs during the Mass or other liturgical service may resume. This includes children's choirs. Choir members, cantors, and musicians are not required to use facial coverings or remain socially distanced. The use of woodwind and brass instruments is also permitted, provided those musicians be spaced at a reasonable distance from each other, other choir members, and the faithful as wind instruments carry more droplets than other instruments.

\*Regarding the offertory collection, all attempts should continue to be made to encourage online giving and/or placing contributions in a basket located near the front of the church or in the gathering area before/after Mass. However, if needed, ushers may utilize the traditional collection baskets with long handles, given appropriate care is taken and the handles/baskets are sanitized after each use. The passing of individual offertory baskets among parishioners is still prohibited.

\*The Offertory Procession may now resume during Mass.

\*The Exchange of the Sign of Peace during Mass may be resumed if the action is a non-tactile greeting. In keeping with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* which states, "it is appropriate that each person, in a sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest." The sign of peace should be a bow or nod of the head in order to reverently offer the peace of Christ given to us through His Death and Resurrection. Pastors are encouraged to use this opportunity to catechize parishioners about appropriate ways to offer the Sign of Peace (realizing that it is more than just a greeting).

\*Deacons should be performing the full range of liturgical functions during the Mass as prescribed in the *Roman Missal* (this would now include preparing the altar, elevating the chalice, etc...). In addition, when a deacon is present and serving at the altar, a separate chalice should be used for the deacon to partake of the Sacred Cup; this additional chalice is not elevated during the *Per ipsum*.

\*For the distribution of Holy Communion, it is still required that all priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion wash and sanitize their hands before distributing communion. If the size of the congregation warrants and the layout of the building permits, additional communion stations should be utilized where a deacon or an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may also distribute communion. Two lines in the center of the church (or to other Communion stations) may now be used by the faithful to come forward to receive the Eucharist. A small table with a corporal, purificator, and a hand disinfecting product, must be used at each Communion station. In addition, the priest or communion minister must practice appropriate sanitizing of their hands after EACH and EVERY communicant who receives on the

tongue or if the priest/minister's hand has substantial contact with the communicant's hand. The distribution of the Sacred Cup to the laity remains suppressed until further notice. Self-communicating and/or intinction is not permitted in any form. However, when a large number of priests are con-celebrating at a Mass, it may be advisable to make use of intinction for the clergy's reception in that particular circumstance.

\*The above guidelines and requirements for the public celebration of Mass should continue to be followed for funeral Masses, weddings, baptisms, and other sacraments.

\*Confirmation – The Office of Worship and Sacraments will send specific guidelines to the respective parishes that are scheduled to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation.

\*Our parishes and communities need to be vigilant in adhering to all of the protocols for the good and safety of everyone so that our churches may remain open for public worship and so that parishioners feel comfortable to attend, and continue attending, Mass and other liturgical services. When broadcasting services or posting pictures on the internet, social media or other means, we must demonstrate our adherence to all of the guidelines so that our actions match our directives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first word.

---

Bishop Mark E. Brennan