

Guidelines for Opening Churches for Public Worship in the Archdiocese of Hartford

Updated: June 1, 2020

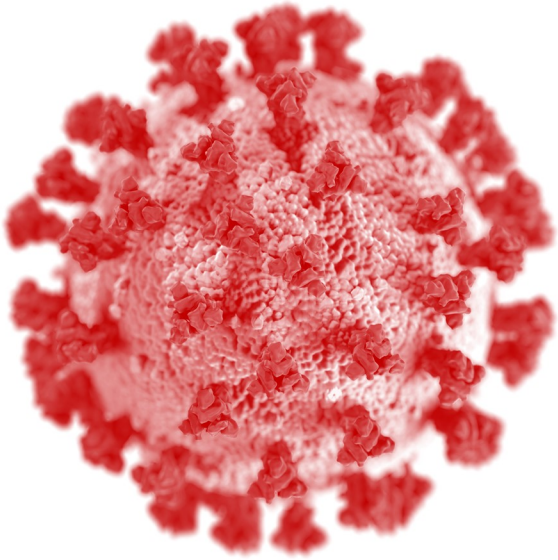




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Basic Information Everyone Needs To Know About Reopening Churches For Public Worship

- **Sunday Mass Obligation** - Archbishop Blair has dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass every Catholic in the Archdiocese of Hartford, and unless otherwise announced, this dispensation will continue through Sunday, September 6.
- **When Will Mass Resume** - As of **Monday, June 8, 2020,** parishes of the Archdiocese of Hartford can reopen for the public celebration of weekday Masses only. A date is not yet determined for the resuming of Sunday Mass but will be considered following the successful implementation of the weekday Mass guidelines of this document.
- **Who Can Come** - In this first stage of resuming public worship, Masses will be subject to a limit of 25% of church building capacity or a maximum of 100 people, whichever is smaller, socially distanced, in keeping with the limitation currently set by the civil authorities.
- **Who Shouldn't Come** - The elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, those who are fearful or anxious, and those who are taking care of a sick or homebound person need not be concerned if they miss Mass as the dispensation from the Sunday obligation has now been extended. Anyone in those categories is asked to continue taking advantage of television of streaming Masses online as they stay home and stay safe.
- **What to Bring** - Unless exempt, those attending Mass are required to wear masks or face coverings and are asked to bring hand sanitizer for use during the liturgy.
- **Social Distancing -** Those attending Mass are required to keep proper social distancing while in the church. This will require everyone to remain 6 feet apart from anyone who is not a member of their household.
- **What About Confession** - As of June 8 the ban on any publicly scheduled confessions is also lifted. This is done, however, at the discretion of the pastor, with the sacrament of Penance only to be resumed when proper procedures are in place.
- **Waiting Until Prepared** - It is the task of each pastor to establish a set of procedures to safely implement the required guidelines in order to resume public liturgies and sacraments in his parish. If a parish cannot offer Mass safely, following the guidelines of this document, they should not offer Mass at the current time.

What Parishes Can Do In Preparing To Reopen Churches For Public Worship

- **Take Your Time** - Parishes should only resume public worship when the details have been worked out and when they can assure the safety of those present. There should be no rush to reopen churches for public worship until this is ensured.
- **Provide Training** - With these new guidelines to follow, ministers and volunteers will need to be properly informed and trained in new policies and routines so they can effectively minister and can guide others in safely being present at Mass.
- **Order Supplies** - Adequate supplies for cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing (both for parishioners and for surfaces) will be required to resume public worship and should be ordered as soon as possible. Given the difficulty of securing cleaning supplies, parishioners could be asked to donate some of their own to the church if they can do so without shortchanging their own domestic needs.
- **Prepare the Church** - Church buildings will need to be measured and marked to ensure that all who are present at liturgies can keep proper social distancing. This information may be shared through tape, signs, or whatever markings are deemed most effective.
- **Remove Unneeded Items** - Items present in the church that are not essential and could possibly transmit disease (e.g. missalettes, hymnals, bulletins, etc.) should be removed for the current time. Any literature distribution stations from around the church should also be removed.
- **Prepare an Attendance System** - As public worship resumes, a limit of 25% of church building capacity or a maximum of 100 people, whichever is smaller, will be allowed in the same space for each liturgy. A system to ensure that larger groups are not present will need to be implemented and enforced.
- **Choose a Location** - For parishes with multiple church buildings, the pastor will need to decide if worship should be resumed in multiple places or, for the time being, only at one worship site.
- **Ask for Help** - If a pastor is uncertain about the guidelines or how to safely implement them, he should contact the Archdiocese of Hartford Chancery Offices with his questions or concerns.

Opening Churches For Public Worship In The Archdiocese Of Hartford

INTRODUCTION

As of **Monday, June 8, 2020,** parishes of the Archdiocese of Hartford can reopen for the public celebration of **weekday** Masses only, subject to a limit of 25% of church building capacity or a maximum of 100 people, whichever is smaller, socially distanced, in keeping with the limitation currently set by the civil authorities, and provided that a parish is in compliance with the directives in this document. Pastors may consider the possibility of more than one Mass a day (for example, a second Mass in the evening) if circumstances warrant it and all the requirements for safe opening are followed.

As for **Sunday** Mass, the **dispensation from the Sunday obligation** previously granted to all Catholics of the archdiocese by the Archbishop has now been extended through Sunday, September 6, 2020. This will remain in effect even when the public celebration of Sunday Mass resumes, hopefully in the very near future.

While many churches can accommodate a congregation of 100 socially distanced people or less, those churches that cannot will have to limit participation accordingly. If a parish has more than one church, serious consideration should be given to start by only opening one church, so that the parish can concentrate on having Mass safely in that one place.

Current live streaming and videos of Mass (weekday and Sunday) should continue so that those who cannot attend will be able to participate and remain connected with the parish.

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BAPTISMS, WEDDING MASSES, AND FUNERAL MASSES

Also as of **June 8**, Baptisms, Wedding Masses and Funeral Masses can resume, but only if all the procedures and precautions given in this document for weekday Mass are applied appropriately to every aspect of these special celebrations, i.e. social distancing of at least 6 feet, the handling and sanitizing of objects, very limited music without congregational singing, no worship aids, etc. Social distancing of at least 6 feet, masks, and sanitizing are especially important for the movement of anyone outside the pews.

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COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY TO A SAFE REOPENING

A basic message from the archdiocese, which can be found at the end of this document, should be reproduced in large print and posted prominently on the church doors. Elements of the message need to be reinforced directly by the parish, especially about wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet. Ultimately each person must determine whether he or she should attend, and if so whether or not they should receive Holy Communion.

Every effort should be made to inform parishioners at large that they are not under the obligation to attend Mass until further notice and that the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, and those who are fearful or anxious, and those who are taking care of a sick or homebound person need not be concerned if they miss Mass.

Parishioners should also be advised that there may not be sufficient room at every weekday Mass for all who wish to attend and that they may not be able to sit in their accustomed pew. If they do come they must wear a face mask, unless prevented by an underlying medical condition, and must observe all the required precautions. Ultimately each person is responsible to determine whether he or she should attend.

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ADVANCE PLANNING

Coordinated and thoughtful planning is imperative for a church to reopen; otherwise it should not do so. A pastor must be able to ensure that the parish is prepared to meet the pandemic requirements for public worship. The requirements are as follows:

1. Prior to reopening for daily Mass a system has to be devised by each parish according to its size and circumstances to limit the number of people who can come to a given Mass. (*EventBrite* and *SignUpGenius* have been mentioned nationally as two possible online options for people to sign up, but this may not work for everyone. Alternately, perhaps people can phone in or contact the parish office by email.)
2. Responsibility has to be assigned for monitoring the number of attendees and enforcing social distancing of at least 6 feet. Identifying the right way to carry out this necessary but potentially sensitive task is crucial and needs to be thought out ahead of time. This should not fall to the clergy unaided. By far the most effective way of safely directing the participation of people is by having good, trained volunteers. People in vulnerable categories should be excluded from volunteering, i.e. people over 60 or with any medical condition that compromises their health, as well as people who have any qualms about endangering their health or who take care of a sick or homebound person. This applies to liturgical roles as well.
3. To ensure the required social distancing of at least 6 feet, tape can be used to mark out places for people to sit in the pews or to stand in line for communion at least 6 feet apart from one another, and pews can be closed to maintain front to back distancing in the church. Members of a single household can be together – so the areas marked out should take that into account.

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ADVANCE PLANNING - CONTINUED

4. Strategies need to be devised as to how people can circulate safely, and how to guide them, making use of lines and arrows on the floor and/or prominent signs directing the flow of traffic.
5. All hymnals and missalettes should be removed from the pews, as well as all literature distribution stations from around the church.
6. Holy water fonts will have to stay empty for some time. They may be covered or marked off in some reverent manner so that people will not be putting their fingers in them out of habit.
7. Collection boxes for any offerings/envelopes should be placed at all the entrances of the church and no collection taken up during Mass.
8. Churches must be cleaned and sanitized before Mass, and there must be a plan in place to clean and sanitize the church and all restrooms between Masses. This may also require a corps of volunteers. Restrooms need to be supplied with plentiful soap and paper toweling, and social distancing of at least 6 feet has to be observed there as well. Given the difficulty of securing cleaning supplies, parishioners could be asked to donate some of their own to the church if they can do so without shortchanging their own domestic needs.
9. Hand sanitizers should be placed at all the entrances of the church, as well as at all bathrooms, but as current shortages of this product may make it difficult for parishes to provide an adequate supply, Mass attendees must also be told to bring their own.
10. Good ventilation in church is important. Besides open windows, a parish should have its HVAC system professionally checked to ensure it is working properly. The installation of an advanced filtering system is recommended.
11. Each priest should have a set of vestments which will be worn only by him, stored separately, and laundered frequently.

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THE CELEBRATION OF WEEKDAY MASS

1. Any priest, minister or volunteer who has a respiratory infection of any kind should not be at Mass.
2. With reasonable exceptions allowed, there should be no public access to the sacristy while the church is open. Gloves should be used by sacristans in the handling of objects.
3. No social gatherings either before or after Mass, including the parking lot.
4. All members of the congregation need to wear masks, with a few exceptions:
    - Children under the age of two should not wear masks.
    - Parents should judge for children between the ages of two and five whether they should wear a mask.
    - All people who claim an exemption for a legitimate health reason (one that does not pose a risk to others) can forego wearing a mask.
5. Except while distributing Holy Communion, in the sanctuary the priest/deacon and any others should not wear masks, but must maintain strict social distancing of at least 6 feet. (Social distancing of at least 6 feet will greatly limit what a deacon can do at the altar).
6. Given that celebrations will be for 100 people or less, if there are to be any ministers at all, they should be limited to a single reader/server (adults not children) and/or a single musician/instrumentalist, socially distanced, with **no** congregational singing at all, since singing has been shown to spread the virus easily. (Health experts indicate that singing produces 6-10 times more droplets from our mouths than recitation.) The elderly and those with health issues should refrain from these functions. There should be no processions, neither entrance nor recessional, other than from the sacristy, and no offertory procession.
7. Just before beginning Mass the priest should sanitize his hands.

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THE CELEBRATION OF WEEKDAY MASS - CONTINUED

8. Orations should be prayed at the altar so there is no need for someone to hold the missal.
9. As mentioned above, there must be no passing of a basket for the offertory; instead, a collection box can be placed in the church.
10. During the consecration, hosts to be distributed should be placed on a second corporal to the side so that they are not directly in front of the priest.
11. There should be no holding of hands during the Our Father and no invitation to exchange a sign of peace.
12. At Communion time the congregation can be reminded that they should not feel obliged to receive Holy Communion if they feel the risk is too high, or for any other reason, and can make an act of Spiritual Communion at their place.
13. If the priest himself is a member of a vulnerable population, a deacon or a trained lay minister should distribute Communion.
14. Congregants who are not coming forward to receive Holy Communion or a blessing should still get out of their pews at the beginning so that no one will have to climb over anyone else.
15. All Communion lines should be single file, with people wearing masks, approaching row by row and keeping six feet apart, except for family members. Neither the priest nor the communicants should wear gloves during the distribution of Holy Communion.
16. The priest will hold the consecrated host over the communicants' outstretched hands and drop the host into their hands without touching their hands. There will be no distribution of the Precious Blood. This applies to deacons as well.

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THE CELEBRATION OF WEEKDAY MASS - CONTINUED

17. Communicants will receive the consecrated host in their hand, step to the side, lower their mask, consume the host, replace their mask, and return to their pew.
18. The priest will have a table next to him with hand sanitizer. In the case of unintentional contact, the priest will sanitize his own hands immediately.
19. Tape on the floor should indicate where to stand as a communicant approaches to receive Communion. There also will be tape on the floor to show where to stand to unmask and consume the host, and arrows showing how to return to the pews.
20. There should be a couple of minutes after Communion for silent prayer, before the final prayer and dismissal.
21. At the end of Mass people should observe safe distancing in exiting, pew by pew, even at the direction of a volunteer if the numbers warrant.
22. After Mass, the priest is to sanitize carefully all the vessels as well as his hands.
23. Communion on the tongue should be excluded for the sake of the health of others, with the understanding that it will be allowed at a later date when it is safe to do so. If people insist, they can be given Communion only after everyone else has received, and the priest should sanitize his hands immediately, even after a single Communion, if his hand touches the communicant's mouth in any way.

If a Parish cannot offer Mass safely, following these guidelines, they should not offer Mass.

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OUTDOOR MASSES

As we approach more pleasant weather, outdoor Masses, cannot be ruled out, and the limit set by the Governor for outdoor gatherings is 150 people with the appropriate safety and social distancing measures in force. More will be said about this once Sunday Masses can resume. Even now, however, gathering outdoors may be of particular help for communities with small church buildings. The following must be observed:

1. All the precautions employed for indoor Masses need to be followed for outdoor Masses, including social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. It is preferable to have participants sit in chairs away from their cars. Participants should bring their own chairs; otherwise the parish will have to make provisions to sanitize parish-provided chairs. The "seating arrangement" should be marked out clearly according to social distancing of at least 6 feet and monitored by volunteers.
3. Any music for Mass outdoors must follow the same restrictions as for indoors.
4. It is desirable that the altar and ambo be on an elevated platform if possible. Care needs to be taken so that the sacred elements are protected from weather.
5. Distribution of Holy Communion needs to be thought out and planned as with an indoor Mass, ensuring proper distancing as communicants wait in line. Distribution should follow all the indoor requirements.
6. Though not envisioned as a recommended scenario, if for any reason the faithful are in their cars, communicants should exit their cars to receive Holy Communion and approach while maintaining social distancing of at least 6 feet. From a health perspective, this is preferable because it permits the ministers to sanitize their hands as necessary, just as with the indoor Mass. Walking from car to car, window to window, makes such hygiene difficult.

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CONFIRMATION AND THE RCIA

The parameters that have been set for weekday Masses apply to parish Confirmation and those things pertaining to the RCIA. The Archbishop has already indicated that he will grant the necessary delegation to Confirm to those pastors who request it. A copy of the ritual text to be used (English and/or Spanish) will be provided to those pastors who receive the delegation. They can be held at the discretion of the pastor beginning any time after June 8, with (for now) no more than 25% of church building capacity or 100 persons, whichever is smaller, socially distanced, etc.

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SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

As of **June 8** the ban on any publicly scheduled confessions is lifted. However, at the discretion of the pastor (for himself and other priest(s) who are willing) the sacrament of Penance can only be resumed, provided that the following procedures are observed:

1. The floor of the church should have tape marks designating where penitents are to wait in line (or designated markings in the pews), with proper social distance in all directions.
2. A volunteer observing social distancing should meet the penitents outside the church or in the vestibule and hand out masks, if they have not brought their own, and require the use of hand sanitizer. The volunteer should also remind individuals that if they have a fever or are ill, they should not enter.
3. Masks should be worn for the entire time the penitents are in the church, except for those who medically have breathing difficulties, for whom social distancing is all the more important.
4. The priest should wear a mask for the entire time he is hearing confessions.
5. In order to maintain social distancing, the traditional "confessional" is **not** to be used. Instead, a space or spaces in the church should be designated to celebrate the sacrament.
6. The priest's chair should be set with a "screen" to his right or left (e.g. a suspended piece of fabric, a cloth panel, etc.) in order to provide for anonymity.

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SACRAMENT OF PENANCE - CONTINUED

7. A chair for the penitent should be set on the other side of the "screen" for a total of at least 6 feet of distance between them. Another chair can be placed at least 6 feet in front of the priest's chair, facing him, for those who wish to celebrate face to face.
8. An appropriate distance should be provided from those waiting to receive the sacrament, in order to maintain confidentiality of the penitents who are making their confession.
9. In giving the penance, the priest should request that the penance be fulfilled outside the church so that no penitent remains in the church after confession.
10. Afterward, the chairs and the pews used while penitents waited need to be cleaned and disinfected.

For even more detailed guidelines for Confession and Anointing, reference can be made to the resource prepared under the auspices of the Thomistic Institute in Washington, DC: https://thomisticinstitute.org/covid-sacraments

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SACRAMENTS FOR THE SICK AND DYING

It is a priestly obligation to minister to the sick and to provide the sacraments for the dying. However, it is also incumbent on the clergy to protect their own health. This means following with extreme care the directives of health care professionals with regard to protective masks and clothing in approaching those who are stricken with the virus and being cautious with anyone who is ill or infirm. Older priests and those with compromised health should avoid ministering during the pandemic.

In administering the Sacrament of the Sick to coronavirus patients, great care should be taken not to contaminate the oil of the sick. Dipping of the thumb in the oil for forehead and hands risks such contamination. Since priests themselves can bless the Oil of the Sick, cotton balls dipped in oil can be blessed using the prayer in the ritual and then used individually and disposed of afterward in an appropriate way, even by the hospital itself. The actual anointing with oil cannot be delegated to someone else, a nurse or doctor, for example.

It should be remembered that "the Christian faithful who are in danger of death from any cause are to be nourished by Holy Communion in the form of *Viaticum*" (canon 921). The ritual provides a rite for emergencies that includes *Viaticum* as well as Penance, Anointing and the Apostolic Pardon.

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SACRAMENTS FOR THE SICK AND DYING - CONTINUED

In light of the dangers posed by the pandemic, any pastoral visits to the homebound by priests, deacons, or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be carried out with great caution and social distancing and only if pastorally necessary in the judgment of the pastor. Any number of televised or online Catholic programs, including Mass, can be recommended to the homebound.

For even more detailed guidelines for Confession and Anointing, reference can be made to the resource prepared under the auspices of the Thomistic Institute in Washington, DC: https://thomisticinstitute.org/covid-sacraments

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR PARISHIONERS

DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS:

Please know that Archbishop Blair has issued a dispensation from the obligation of attending Mass.

- **The decision regarding whether to attend Mass in person is left to the individual.**
- **Contact the Parish Office or check the Parish's website for availability of televised and virtual Masses.**
- **If you or someone in your household is ill, especially with fever or flu-like symptoms or conjunctivitis, please do not enter the Church.**

If you decide to attend Mass,
please be charitable by protecting others and yourself:

- **At all times, including entering and exiting the church, practice Social Distancing by staying at least 6 feet from people who do not live in your household.**
- **You must wear a face mask or cloth face covering.**
- **Do not shake hands with others.**
- **Use hand sanitizers.**
- **Do not congregate to socialize before or after Mass.**

AS WE WELCOME YOU BACK AND RESUME PUBLIC LITURGIES TOGETHER, PLEASE TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO STAY SAFE.