



Reintroduction of Public Masses

Catholics will be allowed to take their first steps back to church for Mass in June under new guidelines issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Alberta.

The Guidelines for the Reintroduction of the Public Celebration of Holy Mass, Stage One (which can be found on the Archdiocesan website at archgm.ca) were developed by a task force the Bishops established under the direction of Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton and Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary. The document follows the recent release of the Alberta government's *Guidance for Places of Public Worship* as part of Stage 1 of the provincial relaunch strategy, as well as consultations with Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health and other experts.

Parishes that have made the necessary preparations will be able to begin offering weekday Masses on Monday, June 1, the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church; and Sunday Masses as of June 7, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. In order to protect the health of parishioners, volunteers, staff and clergy, the Bishops have set a detailed list of conditions that must be met before congregants can safely be invited back to Mass. These include:

- Limiting the total number of participants at each Mass to 50, or fewer if that is required to ensure physical distancing
- Asking attendees to answer a series of health and travel-related questions as recommended by Alberta Health Services
- Recording contact information of attendees for the purpose of contact tracing if necessary
- Sanitizing hands upon entry and exit
- Requiring masks for all volunteers and encouraging attendees also to wear masks
- Observing physical distancing throughout the celebration
- Extra cleaning of the church between Masses.

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Congregants will be able to receive Holy Communion in the form of the consecrated bread, but there will be no distribution of consecrated wine. Communicants will need to wear a mask to approach for Holy Communion, as will the priest when he is distributing it.

During this first stage, singing during Mass will not be allowed, as this activity has been shown to spread respiratory droplets that can infect others with the COVID-19 coronavirus. And any socializing after Mass will have to take place outside, still observing the physical distancing protocol.

The guidelines will apply broadly to the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, Diocese of Calgary, and Diocese of St. Paul. Some particulars will vary in each diocese, so parishes should consult the guidelines for their own diocese.

Parish priests will be busy in the coming days preparing for the return of congregants in small numbers. However, since parishes vary greatly in terms of facilities and resources, it is likely that not all will be able to resume public masses in the first week of June. Parishioners are encouraged to check their parish website for local information.

It has been two months since public celebrations of the Mass were cancelled in Alberta. The full reinstatement of public masses will take place gradually, in parallel with the provincial relaunch strategy.

“The Catholic faithful have lived through a very difficult few months, as they have done their best to prevent the spread of this virus, while at the same time longing to celebrate Mass with their community and receive Holy Communion” said Archbishop Pettipas. “What we have achieved so far is the first step, Phase One, of a return to celebrating our faith as it is meant to be. The pandemic is not over, so we must still be very careful. I ask for the prayers of our people and the cooperation of everyone in the hope that we may move steadily and cautiously ahead.”

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