



Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon **OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**

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May 15, 2020
Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter

What to Expect When Public Mass Resumes

To the Faithful of the Diocese of Saskatoon:

As painful as the decision was to suspend all public Masses in the Diocese of Saskatoon, the process was straight-forward and necessary for the common good.

As we see numbers flatten and decrease, we are beginning to sense the situation improving. For the interest of the common good, and ultimately to best serve our own community, we do not want to contribute to a rebound effect that would push normal Mass attendance even further into the future.

When health restrictions are eased and we are able to start gathering together again, it is important for everyone to understand that things will not immediately go back to normal.

Health experts and civic leaders are currently determining new guidelines and restrictions for the next weeks and months, and at the same time the Diocese of Saskatoon is planning for how public Masses will be celebrated with respect to any new regulations.

In issuing the new directives, it is understood that the possibility still exists that every parish may not be able to offer Mass open to the public due to, but not limited to:

- factors including the vulnerability of the priest himself;
- an inability to safely provide the additional personnel needed;
- an inability to sufficiently sanitize worship spaces between uses; and/or
- other circumstances.

We know the desire to return to your parishes, participate in the liturgy, and receive the Eucharist is incredibly strong, but we ask that everyone approach this reopening with a patient, loving and charitable mindset. A gradual three-phased process will be rolled out with specific dates and directives to follow determined by our Diocesan leaders.

PHASE ONE – CURRENTLY IN PLACE

Churches are accessible for individuals and families to attend for personal prayer. No liturgies or group gatherings for devotional prayer are permitted at this time. The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may take place, as outlined by each parish. Funerals and weddings can occur as necessary in consultation with the pastor provided all provisions of the government health authorities are followed.

PHASE TWO – MAY 22, 2020

Churches will be permitted to celebrate public Sunday and weekday Masses with very specific restrictions, such as cleaning and disinfecting, the strict practice of personal distancing, and with the limited number of people present consistent with the civil guidelines. Baptisms may resume under the same principles.

PHASE THREE - DATE TBD

All other sacraments will resume according to the Directives provided by the Diocese and civil authorities. Options are given to pastors to carry out the Sacrament of Confirmation along with First Eucharist.

Five Things to Be Mindful of During the Return Process

- 1. A general dispensation from the Sunday obligation will remain.** The dispensation for the obligation to attend Mass will remain in effect. No one will be required to attend Mass when the return process begins. At first, parishioners may not be able to attend Mass on a regular basis. Because of this, the live-streaming of Masses will continue for those who are not able to attend at their churches/ parish.
- 2. Attendance will be limited.** Restriction will remain on holding large gatherings. We do hope that eventually a calculation given the size of the church may be used to determine the safe number of people for a given building, but for now we will be strictly following the maximum number for all gatherings as set out by the health authority.
- 3. Personal Distancing must be consistently practiced.** Expect that your parish church will have pews/rows that are sectioned off, and that family groups and individuals will be asked to keep at least two meters (six feet) of separation from each other. Be prepared to wear a mask to Mass to guard against germ spread. Anyone with **any** symptoms of sickness or who have travelled out of country in the past 14 days are directed to stay home.

4. **Liturgical changes will be in place.** Similar to protocols established when churches were closing, extra precautions will be taken. Temporary adjustments will be made with respect to how we celebrate Mass and receive Holy Communion. These will be outlined by the parish priest.

5. **There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass. Even with best health practices and strict personal distancing, anyone who enters a public space should recognize there is a risk of contracting the Coronavirus. Improved cleaning will occur at our churches, but no one should expect that they will be any safer from germs than in other public spaces.**

We all need to recognize that this is a unique time and we will need to continue to work together to make progress. There will still be challenges and limits on what we can do in our churches. Many people may not be able to attend Mass the first few weeks it resumes. We are following these guidelines in order to protect those among us at most risk – our elders and people with compromised health who could be especially devastated if they were to contract the virus.

Let us commit to this program of incrementally moving back into gatherings at our churches. Of course, we are aware that if infections begin to increase, we will be required to return to stricter protocols. Each one of us is called to be faithful and caring members of the Body of Christ as we expand activities in our parishes.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ mshagemoen".

✠ Most Reverend Mark A. Hagemoen
Bishop of Saskatoon