



May 8, 2020 Guidelines Announced for Parishes in 'Yellow' Zone Counties

HARRISBURG, Pa. – As counties transition from “red” to “yellow,” the Diocese of Harrisburg has provided new guidelines for parishes in these “yellow” zones. These guidelines were developed after reviewing the directives from the Governor’s Office and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as studies provided through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Diocese will review and amend these directives as this situation continues to develop.

The full guidelines for parishes in “yellow” counties are available here. These new guidelines take effect the weekend of May 17 for the parishes within the four counties transitioning to “yellow” today – Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union. The one week delay is to give parishes the necessary time to implement these guidelines and to provide time for parishes to communicate these changes to parishioners. While these are general guidelines provided by the Diocese, individual pastors may choose to continue some restrictions if the health and safety of their parishioners are still in question. Bishop Gainer also asks parishioners to not cross counties when churches begin to reopen, in order to ensure parishioners have primary access to their own parish churches and to respect the government’s stay-at-home order.

Highlights of these guidelines include:

- The dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass is still in place. All Mass livestreams are to continue.
- Public Masses may resume at the Pastor’s discretion, so long as social distancing and proper sanitation is observed. Sanitation must take place after every Mass. Parish buildings may contain no more than 1/3 occupancy at any given time. Please contact your parish directly for more information on any changes to Mass schedules.
- Public Masses may also take place in church halls, outdoors and in church parking lots.
- All parishioners attending Mass must wear a face mask. Masks may only be removed when receiving Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion will be distributed after Mass. We recommend that Holy Communion be received on the hand.
- Confessions may resume at the Pastor’s discretion, pending social distancing and proper sanitation are followed. Creative means of confessions, including using outdoor spaces, are encouraged.

- Weddings, funerals, and baptisms may resume, so long as occupancy and all protective measures are followed.
- Adoration chapels may be opened with limited hours, occupancy and strict sanitization after each visitor.
- Parishes are to use tape or rope to indicate proper social distancing within the parish buildings, including the pews.
- Proper sanitation will occur after every gathering and at the close of every day.
- Holy Water fonts will remain empty. Bottled holy water may be available for parishioners to take home.
- All hymnals, missals, missalettes and Bibles will be removed. Printed worship aids may be provided for all public Liturgies. These worship aids will be disposed by the user when leaving the church. Projection devices may also be used.
- The Sign of Peace will continue to be omitted.
- Limited public entrances may be opened.

A change for parishioners will be the distribution of Holy Communion after Mass. This will ensure proper social distancing, sanitary conditions and leaves space for those not comfortable receiving Holy Communion at this time. Below are the procedures parishes are asked to follow:

- After the priest's reception of Holy Communion (and that of the other clergy present), the priest places the vessel with the consecrated hosts for distribution into the tabernacle. Mass then continues and is concluded.
- After the Dismissal or after the final hymn, a small table with hand sanitizer is set up at the location for distribution of Holy Communion.
- The assembly forms a line to receiving Holy Communion, keeping six feet apart.
- The priest will begin the distribution of Holy Communion with, "Behold, the Lamb of God . . ." The people make the response, "Lord, I am not worthy."
- Each communicant approaches to receive Holy Communion, lowering their mask when they are next to receive. We recommend that Holy Communion be received on the hand.
- The priest (or, whoever is distributing), should purify and sanitize his hands as often as he thinks is necessary. This is not necessary after each person. It is necessary if contact has been suspected or if a communicant requests it.

Following the directives of our state government, those who are sick, or those who have health conditions that make them more susceptible to illness (or germs and viruses), should continue to remain at home at this time. The Diocese of Harrisburg will continue to update our guidelines regarding public Mass and the sacraments. The most up to date information can be found here: <http://www.hbgdiocese.org/coronavirus>.