



## DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

• P.O. Box 230, Wheeling, WV 26003 •

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As government officials begin the process of re-opening the economy in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Most Rev. Mark Brennan, Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston said plans are underway to resume the public celebration of Mass in Churches across the Diocese.

Brennan said Msgr. Eugene Ostrowski, vicar general for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, and a committee, compiled of religious and lay leaders, are working on recommendations to safely resume the public celebration of the Mass.

“The Governor has laid out a series of specific guidelines that must be followed in order to safely resume the public celebration of Mass in Churches across the state after the stay at home order is lifted,” Bishop Brennan said. “While respecting our public officials’ norms, we are developing our plan for the resumption of public Masses on the basis of Catholic liturgical practice and Church law as well as with an abundance of caution to preserve the health and safety of our people and their priests.

“Additionally, the dispensation to attend Mass on Sunday will be continued until further notice. There are many across our Diocese who are elderly or who are in what health officials deem ‘high risk’ for COVID-19. We must continue the dispensation for their benefit, and I encourage those faithful to remain in their homes and continue to watch Masses on TV or via live stream.”

Ostrowski said that the committee will compile the norms which will then be sent to parishes. The parishes will then submit an action plan which must be approved by the bishop before public Masses can resume.

Among the norms set forth by the governor are mandates that ensure proper social distancing is maintained inside the Church—including leaving every other pew empty. Others include: instructing people who are sick to stay home; maintaining proper hygiene and making hand sanitizer available to all; requiring those in attendance to wear a facemask; and properly sanitizing surfaces after each Mass. Ostrowski added there will also be a limited amount of people allowed in the Church at a specific time.

“The committee,” Ostrowski said, “is researching ways to creatively enter and exit Churches while maintaining proper social distancing. We are looking at additional measures such as emptying the Holy Water fonts; changing the methods of taking up the offertory collection during Mass; and limiting the number of musicians and cantors.

The Diocese will also maintain recommendations set forth before the suspension of public celebrations of the Mass. These include suspending the “sign of peace” during the Mass; not

offering the Precious Blood during Communion; and requiring all volunteers and liturgical ministers maintain proper hygiene before and during Mass.

“There are a great number of challenges to safely gather our faithful in Churches throughout the State,” Ostrowski said. “It is prudent for us to do so in the safest manner possible. This committee is determined to ensure the health and safety of the Catholic faithful as well as our priests. Doing so fulfills Christ’s command to love our neighbor.”

Officials at the Diocese also said that the live stream of daily and weekend Masses will continue post-quarantine on its website, [dwc.org/mass](http://dwc.org/mass).

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