



Public liturgies may begin May 18 across the Diocese of Evansville

By Tim Lilley
The Message editor

Editor's note: The information in this story is based on current Indiana and local guidelines. Direction from the State of Indiana and local health departments could influence how these schedules unfold moving forward, so these dates are subject to change. Readers are strongly encouraged to follow all the guidelines included in this story.

The Diocese of Evansville has announced that beginning May 18, parishes across the diocese may begin celebrating weekday public Masses in parish churches, with Sunday Masses resuming May 23-24. These liturgies will be subject to schedules established by each parish. Funeral Masses, wedding Masses and scheduled confessions in parish churches will also be offered beginning May 18.

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel made these determinations after consultation with the Diocese of Evansville College of Consultors, Council of Priests and Deans – and following the Revised Guidance for Places of Worship issued by the State of Indiana.

It is important to note that social-distancing guidelines must be followed at Masses, which will reduce – in some cases significantly – the seating capacities of churches across our 12 counties.

Off-site Masses at sites including, but not limited to, chapels in hospitals, nursing homes and other senior centers remain suspended until further notice.

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days will continue until at least Aug. 15, 2020.

Those age 65 and older, and those of any age with underlying medical issues, are strongly encouraged to stay home and participate in online livestream Masses, which will continue to be provided.

“I want to express my sincere admiration for the people of our diocese for their perseverance in faith and their patience during this most difficult time,” said Bishop Siegel. “I also want to thank our priests and parish staffs for the many creative ways they have reached out to their parish families and communities to maintain contact and provide assistance whenever possible.”

Bishop Siegel added, “While everyone is anxious to return to the public celebration of Mass, we need to provide sufficient time for our parishes to thoroughly clean their churches, to make preparations to accommodate state guidelines for social distancing, sanitizing the building after each Mass and other safety protocols as well as training liturgical ministers in new procedures, particularly the distribution of Holy Communion. The bishops of the five dioceses of the Indianapolis Province (Indianapolis, Evansville, Fort Wayne-South Bend, Gary and Lafayette) committed to resuming public liturgies by May 30, the Vigil of Pentecost, across our state. Our plan resumes public liturgies almost two weeks before that date.”

Bishop Siegel emphasized that it is vitally important for those who are most vulnerable to significant impact from COVID-19 to stay home. For those who will return to churches for Mass and other liturgies, it is imperative that they follow the state guidelines for places of worship to help protect the health and safety of their fellow parishioners.

Guidelines include social-distancing with necessary seating limitations, the use of hand sanitizer and avoiding contact with those outside of their immediate families. The state guidelines mandate at least six feet of distance between individuals and family groups. Immediate family members who live in the same home may sit together. Although not required, it is strongly recommended that people put on face masks before entering churches and wear them while inside. Face masks should only be removed for the reception of Communion.

Bishop Siegel and the Diocesan Office of Worship are providing additional, detailed instructions to priests regarding the resumption of public liturgies. The faithful are urged to follow parish websites and social media accounts for additional information that will apply to the churches they will attend.