

MOST REVEREND
LOUIS F. KIHNEMAN, III
BISHOP OF BILOXI



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
1790 POPPS FERRY ROAD
BILOXI, MS 39532-2118
228-702-2111
FAX: 228-702-2139

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BILOXI RETURNING TO WORSHIP TOGETHER

In the Diocese of Biloxi, the following policies and procedures are effective May 23, 2020. Included in this decree are the instructions listed in “INITIAL STEPS FOR RETURNING TO WORSHIP TOGETHER”.

THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY MASS

- The faithful continue to be dispensed from the obligation to participate in Holy Mass.
- Those who are illness-free may return to Mass on Sundays or weekdays, *without obligation*, in numbers that can be suitably arranged in the church while allowing for 6-feet of physical distance between individuals or family groups who live in the same household.
- The faithful who participate in Mass may receive Holy Communion if they are free to do so and guidelines are followed as described below.
- Personal protective masks are to be worn by ushers, those serving at the Altar, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and are highly recommended for all attending Mass. They are to be worn by all those distributing Holy Communion, including clergy.
- If you require the assistance of altar server(s), in addition to proper distancing, use of mask, and hand washing/sanitizing, their use of shared special attire should be temporarily suspended, unless their albs, cassocks, surplices, etc. will be washed after each use.
- The Book of the Gospels may be placed on the Altar before Mass.
- The offertory should be “touchless” except for the ushers. Stationary baskets or collection baskets with handles should be used. Ushers should wear masks and make use of hand sanitizer before and after the collection and the collection baskets should be sanitized before and after each Mass.
- Exchanging the Sign of Peace by means of physical contact remains suspended. The sign of peace may be, e.g., verbal or with a bow or wave to those nearby.
- Priests are temporarily dispensed from the rubric “He bows slightly” before each consecration.
- Prior to distribution of Holy Communion, Clergy and other Ministers are to make use of hand sanitizer. This may be done in a more conspicuous way to put minds at ease.
- The Body of Christ may be offered to the faithful. Reception of the Precious Blood from a common chalice is suspended for the time being. As the whole Christ is contained in the consecrated Host, a Priest Celebrant should ordinarily consecrate only enough wine necessary for him alone to receive the Precious Blood.
- While communicants retain the right to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, Pastors should encourage the faithful to receive on the hand. A Minister of Holy Communion is to use hand sanitizer after each individual who receives on the tongue, who may be asked, where advisable, to approach Holy Communion at the end of the line. Ministers of Holy Communion are to distribute the consecrated Hosts with special care, being cautious not to touch the communicant. If there is accidental touching, the Minister is to pause to use hand sanitizer.

OTHER

- If members of the congregation have celiac disease and are entirely unable to receive even the Body of Christ from consecrated ultra-low gluten altar breads, the Priest may consecrate wine in a separate chalice or chalices to provide the Precious Blood for those individuals. Special care must be taken when purifying the sacred vessels.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under the age of 2 do not wear masks or face coverings.
- Avoid handing out bulletins; instead send parish information to parishioners electronically, by social media, or mail.
- Parishioners should be reminded that Phase 1 is not just for inside the church and during Mass. Only with a successful implementation of Phase 1 can localities proceed to Phase 2 and Phase 3. Please encourage parishioners to keep appropriate physical distance between them as they leave the church and return to their cars. There should be no groups gathering before or after Mass.
- Have a checklist of what's been cleaned, when, and who cleaned. Check the checklist before each Mass to ensure that all tasks are complete.
- Develop a list of procedures for your volunteers prior to their return and be sure they understand the protocol.
- Communicate with your parishioners and post health requirements for distancing, hygiene, wearing of facemasks, alternate locations for Mass, receiving Holy Communion, and other details.
- Before someone who has had the virus returns to participation at Mass, they should have 14 days without symptoms or 2 negative tests.
- These steps will not address every situation you may encounter when planning for parishioners to return to church. Other common sense practices are allowed for, according to the principal of subsidiarity.

Let us remember in prayer those who have died, those who are sick, medical professionals, those whose work places them in proximity to the virus, and all who are out of work, worried and hurting at this time. I assure you of remembrance in my prayers and daily Masses.

Given at the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Biloxi on May 1, 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louis Kihneman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Louis F. Kihneman
Bishop of Biloxi

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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BILOXI INITIAL STEPS FOR RETURNING TO WORSHIP TOGETHER

Below is a list of things that should be done/prepared for before we can welcome parishioners back to our churches.

PREPARATION

- Bishop Kihneman will continue to dispense the faithful from the obligation to participate in Holy Mass, and **anyone who is ill will be asked to stay home in charity to others.**
- Vulnerable individuals, those 65 and older or with underlying health conditions, should continue to shelter in place. Families with vulnerable individuals are encouraged to continue to take special precautions.
- Hand sanitizer should be provided at church entrances and at other appropriate places in the church (e.g., at the credence table, the Priest Celebrant's chair, restrooms) and other parish buildings.
- Masks for clergy, ushers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Altar Servers, and extra for parishioners should be provided. (Can be ordered through Sun Coast Supply, 228-868-2522.)
- Pews and the floor where the communion line forms should be marked with six-foot spacing (using painter's tape, etc.). In ordinary circumstances, every other pew will not be used.
- Pews, including tops, seats and kneelers, are to be sanitized before all Masses as well as all touch surfaces.
- If books and reusable worship aids cannot be sanitized between each Mass, they should be removed from the pews/church.
- Chairs in the sanctuary should be moved to be six feet apart and ministers at the Altar should be reminded of proper distancing (tape markings may be helpful).
- Holy water fonts should be empty and not be used. Other methods of providing holy water (e.g., small individual/family bottles) can be devised, if desired.
- Church doors should be frequently sanitized or left open.
- Parishes should consider handwashing signs for restrooms and assure soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer are replenished. The Diocese of Dallas has free printable signs in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese: <https://www.cathdal.org/handwash>. Other instructional signage may be needed.
- Livestreaming of Mass should be available, contact Terry Dickson for instruction if needed, tdickson@biloxidiocese.org, 228-702-2126.
- **Preparations should be made to livestream Mass into the Parish Hall or other appropriate space to accommodate the 6-foot spacing of parishioners and for them to be able to receive Holy Communion.** The space should be prepared as indicated above. If you do not have a parish hall or other suitable space, contact your Dean, the Vicar General's office, or Bishop's office for alternative ideas.
- Pastors/priests will be able to temporarily increase the number of weekend Masses and may wish to consider Masses for special groups: the elderly, youth, etc.
- Communicate your plan with local officials: mayor, police chief, sheriff, etc.