



Office of the Vicar General

Diocese of Erie

429 East Grandview Boulevard
Post Office Box 10397
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397

May 7, 2020

To: All clergy
From: Msgr. Edward M. Lohse
Re: New protocols effective May 10
Date: May 7, 2020

From the Bishop:

On May 5, the Presbyteral Council discussed how we could begin to restore public worship now that the diocese will be entering the Yellow Phase of Pennsylvania's COVID-19 response on Friday, May 8. From the council's discussion, the following plan emerged:

- STEP 1: Restore permission for scheduled periods of adoration and scheduled times for confessions as of Sunday, May 10. **See the protocols below.** Pastors will need to consider their own health concerns as well as the situation in the parish, the configuration of the church building, and the ability to meet the protocols before deciding if and when to restore these scheduled times in their own parishes.
- STEP 2: Over the next two weeks, the deans will discuss with the priests of their deaneries some possible next steps to be taken. Of immediate concern is how to make the Eucharist available to people. The Presbyteral Council will reconvene on May 20 to assess the input gathered by the deans.
- STEP 3: This will come from the May 20 council discussion based on input from the priests.

PROTOCOLS BEGINNING ON SUNDAY MAY 10:

1. General protocols:

- Suspension of all public Masses remains in effect.
- The dispensation from Sunday Mass obligations remains in place throughout the diocese.
- A dispensation from the Easter Duty is granted throughout the diocese.
- Livestreaming of Masses (both daily and Sunday) should continue wherever feasible.
- Spiritual Communion should continue to be strongly encouraged.

- Regular pastoral visits to hospitals and to the home-bound remain suspended. Priests and deacons only (no lay ministers) may visit the home-bound for emergency sacramental visits but must wear masks when doing so.
- Except in urgent need (e.g., danger of death or serious illness), the Sacraments of Initiation should be further delayed until we can resume public Masses. At this point, it is not clear when that will be, but we will restore small-group public Masses and the opportunity to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation as soon as possible.

2. Scheduled periods of public Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

- Social distancing must be observed.
- Wherever possible, the doors of the church should be propped open during adoration so that people can come and go without needing to touch the doors.
- The priest or deacon may opt not to wear a mask when functioning in the sanctuary, but otherwise all present are to wear masks.
- Longer periods during which people can attend adoration are preferred to shorter periods, so as not to gather large groups in the church at the same time.
- Nothing should remain in the pews. Hymnals and similar items should be removed and placed in storage.
- Hand sanitizer should be available to parishioners. Pews, door handles, door plates and other similar surfaces must be wiped down between periods of adoration.

3. Scheduled periods for confession.

- Social distancing must be observed.
- Wherever possible, the doors of the church should be propped open so that people can come and go without needing to touch the doors.
- Wherever possible, confessions should be heard in the body of the church rather than in a confessional or reconciliation room.
- Both the priest and the penitent must wear a mask.

OTHER UPDATES:

- We will not gather in Latrobe for Emmaus this year, but the Clergy Continuing Formation Committee is exploring some options for ways to mark the days of Emmaus here in the diocese, perhaps on a deanery level, during the already-scheduled Emmaus week. More information will be sent when possible.
- The “extraordinary assembly” meeting between the priests and the Bishop which had been scheduled for April 1 will be rescheduled for a future date, once we are able to gather again in a large group.
- At this point in time, the priest retreats scheduled for August and September are still on. Please watch for updates.
- There have been questions about the possibility of Sunday weddings to help with a back-log of COVID-19 delayed celebrations. Bishop Persico has indicated that dispensations for Sunday weddings will be determined on a case-by-case basis upon request.