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Dispensation lifted: Catholics return to Sunday Mass Aug. 15

Significant majority are already attending

The Catholic bishops of Pennsylvania have issued a joint statement indicating that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass, which went into effect in March 2020 — just as the pandemic significantly impacted all facets of life in the United States — will soon be lifted. The bishops are reinstating the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and holy days beginning on Sunday, Aug. 15, 2021, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As always, the obligation does not apply to those with serious illness or health risks, as well as their caregivers.

“I am very pleased that the effects of the pandemic have subsided enough that we can finally gather safely for Mass on Sundays and holy days,” the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, said. “The number of people already attending Sunday Mass has been growing steadily, and I know people are truly celebrating the opportunity to receive the Eucharist and to be back in their parish communities.”

Bishop Persico explained that attending Mass on Sundays and holy days is important for a number of reasons.

“We gather at Mass to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the source of our existence,” he said. “It’s a reminder of the special relationship we have with God and with each other in community. We are fortunate to have an opportunity to honor God and to give God glory, praise and thanks each week.”

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The bishop said now that the pandemic seems to be easing, he has seen people coming back to their parish communities with a deepened appreciation. He looks forward to having all members of parishes return to Mass.

“The community is not whole when some are missing,” he said.

According to the statement released by Pennsylvania’s bishops, available at www.eriecd.org/news/news-releases.html, “We have all known and felt the impact of COVID-19 in so many ways as individuals and families, among friends and at work. It has been a time of hardship and struggle, of separation and isolation. It has also had an impact on our lives of faith. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, has been with us throughout this very difficult period and is most especially near to us when we encounter him in the Eucharist. The Eucharist offers us his healing and peace, his mercy and reconciliation. It is time for everyone to return to the Eucharist with renewed faith and joy.”

The joint statement also emphasizes that the obligation to attend Mass, “as is always the case, does not apply to those who are seriously ill, have a serious health risk, as well as those who have serious anxiety about being a part of large groups at this time.” It points out that the obligation does not apply to those who care for those who cannot attend Mass in person. The bishops encourage those who are legitimately excused from Mass on Sundays and holy days to spend time in prayer, to meditate on the death and resurrection of the Lord, to read Scripture and to unite themselves to Christ. They also urge people to view a livestreamed or broadcast Mass intended for those who cannot participate in person.

Parishes across the Diocese of Erie are preparing to launch a campaign, *Re-membering Our Sunday Story*, to help ensure that Catholics are warmly invited to return to worship on Sunday, to the joy of encountering Christ both in the Eucharist and within the life of their parish communities.

“I asked our Faith Formation Office to create a team for this purpose early this year,” Bishop Persico said, “and between now and the end of the year, a wide array of resources will be made available to parishes. There is a great sense of joy as parish communities have begun coming together, and we want to help people grow in their sense of renewal and gratitude.”

The bishop said he is grateful to be making the announcement.

“This is a moment to thank God anew for the great gift of the Mass and the real presence of Jesus to us in his body and blood as well as the joy of gathering together as people of faith, united in prayer and good works,” he said.

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Bishop Persico will be available for interviews on Thursday, July 15 at 11 am. Please contact Anne-Marie Welsh at amwelsh@eriecd.org or 814.746.6889 to reserve a time.