



**ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE of ORANGE**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

### **DIOCESE OF ORANGE ANNOUNCES LIMITED PUBLIC MASSES CAN BEGIN ON SUNDAY, JUNE 14 IN PHASED APPROACH**

**MEDIA CONTACT:**  
**TRACEY KINCAID**

**OFFICE:**  
714-282-3075

**E-MAIL:**  
MEDIA@RCBO.ORG

**GARDEN GROVE, CALIF., (May 22, 2020)** – The Diocese of Orange announced today that public masses can begin in Orange County on the solemnity of Corpus Christi, Sunday, June 14 (including Saturday June 13 Vigil Masses) in a phased-in approach with measures in place to safeguard public health. In addition, the Bishop of Orange, Kevin W. Vann, extends a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation until such time as it is deemed safe to have large gatherings at Mass.

After extensive consultation over these past few months with civil authorities, County of Orange Health Authority, as well as with our medical advisors, the decision was made to gradually open the churches for Mass with strict guidelines for attendance including important requirements for the distribution and reception of Holy Communion and the safety and health of all who attend. Bishop Vann acknowledges the hard work of Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento, on behalf of all the California bishops, who met frequently with Governor Newsom and his staff. The positive cooperation of all involved – working together for the common good – has helped bring us to this important moment.

“The pandemic is far from over so we will begin with small steps,” said Bishop Vann. “Realizing that reinfection is a concern, as we saw occurred in Texas and elsewhere, I am asking our pastors to prepare their churches to ensure that these guidelines are followed without exception.” Indeed advisors to the bishop have been working on guidelines for weeks, in consultation with county officials and other experts.

The Diocese announced that phase one brings smaller groups of healthy Catholics back to a limited Mass with strict social distancing guidelines and rules. Phase two would allow larger groups while phase three would allow choirs to return to church and social gatherings to resume. At this point, it is unknown when we might be able to enter phases two and three. Phasing our return allows for the ability to re-evaluate the process as necessary in order to ensure the health and safety of the community going forward.

All phases of this plan require following strict guidelines for social distancing and sanitization.

- Those over age 65 and/or with a co-morbidity will be encouraged to consider not returning to Mass just yet, and anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing symptoms of sickness should not come to church.

- The church will be thoroughly sanitized/cleaned before and after each service, including all entryways and doors. Holy water fonts will be empty, and hymnals removed.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at all churches.
- All local safety orders specifically relating to proper face coverings will be followed.
- People will be instructed to not engage in any physical touch, such as by greeting each other.
- Signs and other instructions will encourage normal safe practices necessary to avoid the spread (e.g. cough or sneeze into a shirtsleeve, handkerchief, or tissue; avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth).
- Ventilation will be increased as much as possible by opening windows and doors, as weather permits.
- The sign of peace and distribution of the Precious Blood is suspended.

Catholics should visit the website of their parish for eventual specific instructions on how their parish will offer Masses and how attendance will be allowed. In most cases, only one-third of the church space will be available per Mass. Bishop Vann has granted a temporary dispensation from the requirements of canon 932, which will permit priests to celebrate Mass outside the sacred space of a church building, thereby permitting parishes to utilize other spaces for Masses including gymnasiums, parish halls and outdoor spaces.

Since the Sunday obligation has been dispensed from, Catholics will be encouraged to attend other Masses during the week instead of on Sunday, in order to spread out the number of people attending. More Masses than usual will be offered to attempt to accommodate everyone who desires to attend Mass during this phase. In addition, many parishes will continue to livestream Masses.

Anyone who is in an at-risk health group or does not feel comfortable attending a public gathering should stay home. Also, anyone who is sick or has been exposed to the coronavirus should refrain from attending a public Mass as it is an act of Christian charity to safeguard the health of others.

“Please continue to pray for those who have died, those who are sick from this disease and for the people who care for them,” said Bishop Vann. “I wish to thank everyone for their sacrifices over these last weeks to benefit the common

good. It has been a time of reflection, prayer and growth in faith for many of us. We will continue to take one day at a time and walk in faith together until the day we can all gather to rejoice in the Lord. The Solemnity of Corpus Christi (the Body and Blood of Christ) is a very fitting feast day to begin our journey to once again gather together as the Lord's people."

### **About the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange**

With 1.3 million Catholics, 57 parishes, 5 Catholic centers, and 41 schools, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange is one of the largest and most diverse faith communities in the United States. The Diocese encourages Catholics across Orange County to have an active life of faith that is integrated and woven into the fabric of their daily lives through the community and sacramental life of the Church. Under the leadership of Bishop Kevin Vann, the Diocese works to establish and support dynamic, vibrant parishes and schools welcoming all to live the Gospel with faith, joy, charity and unity. Christ Cathedral, the spiritual home of the Diocese, was dedicated in July 2019.

Learn more about the Diocese of Orange at <https://www.rcbo.org>.

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PASTORAL CENTER: COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT  
13280 CHAPMAN AVENUE, GARDEN GROVE, CA 92840  
OFFICE: 714-282-3075      FAX: 714-282-3029