

# **FAQs about Returning to Mass**

## **1. When will the obligation to attend Mass be reinstated?**

The general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation in the Diocese of Charlotte will be reinstated effective Sunday, May 23, 2021. However, some exemptions will continue (see #4 below).

## **2. Why is the exemption from Mass ending now?**

It is important that we begin returning to Mass, when and where possible, in recognition of the essential and central nature of the Eucharist in our lives.

In the challenging year since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, we all have adapted to protect the health and well-being of everyone in our communities. Safety precautions in place at our churches, such as capacity limits and rigorous cleaning protocols, have proven effective at making in-person worship possible without undue risk of spreading the virus. And while livestreamed Masses have been a means to help us nourish our souls when we could not be physically present in church, we must remember that “virtual” worship is not the norm. God did not come to us virtually. He came to us – and continues to come to us – in the flesh. For us Catholics, unmediated contact with the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Our Lord in offering this sacrifice to God the Father is irreplaceable and essential.

## **3. Does this mean everyone is now obligated to go to Mass again?**

No. We know there remains concern about the spread of infection and we must remain vigilant to limit its spread, particularly among those most vulnerable. With this in mind, there are particular exceptions (called “dispensations”) granted to people in certain circumstances – including those who are ill and those who care for anyone who is at risk of serious complications from COVID-19.

In reinstating the Sunday obligation, we must welcome back to Mass all Catholics who are now engaging in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling, partaking in non-essential shopping, and widening one’s circle of contacts. Returning to Mass is an acknowledgement of our need and desire for the Eucharist to nourish and strengthen us.

## **4. Who is still exempted from attending Mass?**

People who are ill or vulnerable to infection are still encouraged to stay at home and attend Mass virtually, on TV or online. If you live in the diocese (or are visiting within the diocese), you are not required to attend Mass on

Sundays or holy days of obligation if:

You are ill or your health would be significantly compromised if you were to contract a communicable illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category).

You exhibit flu-like symptoms.

You have good reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness (such as being in recent contact with someone who tested positive for a contagious illness such as COVID-19 or influenza).

You care for the sick, homebound or infirm.

You are pregnant, or caring for small children.

You are 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation of high-risk individuals).

You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (such as no Mass is offered, you are infirm, or you are prevented for some reason you cannot control).

If you have questions about whether these exemptions apply to you, or if you have significant anxiety about returning to Mass, please contact your pastor or your parish office.

These categories will be reviewed and revised as needed.

## **5. Was this decision made in consultation with healthcare experts?**

Yes. We have monitored the guidelines and requirements from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, local health officials, and recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. All decisions regarding our practices during the pandemic have been informed and guided by experts in the medical community.

## **6. Are some safety precautions still in place?**

Yes. The health and safety of our communities has been and remains paramount as we continue to monitor local conditions. While the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services no longer recommend social distancing or face coverings for those who are fully vaccinated, anyone who is vulnerable or not vaccinated is encouraged to continue wearing a face covering and to follow social distancing norms. In addition, congregants' reception of Holy Communion from the chalice and the Sign of Peace are to remain omitted. Each church has specific protocols adapted for its own particular circumstances, so please

contact your parish office if you have questions.