From the Bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church

Very Rev. and Rev. Fathers, Parish Committees and my dear brothers and sisters,

After the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the difficult time of quarantine, the States within our country are now dealing with the issues of reopening and the resumption of different aspects of our daily lives. Certainly we know that things will not just go back to “normal” but we also know that worship and attendance at Holy Mass are a vital and essential part of the lives of Polish National Catholics as Catholic Christians.

As the time of the loosening of our quarantine comes, the bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church have continued to discuss how and when our parish churches may begin to resume public worship especially the public celebration of Holy Mass. We have received information from a number of conference calls specifically for faith communities with participation by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other governmental agencies. This information has helped to guide us in making sure all are kept safe and well as worship resumes.

There are no dates given within these guidelines for when this will occur for our Holy Church. The P.N.C.C. is found in many states with different severity of the crisis and even each Diocese within the P.N.C.C. covers many states. The timeline for the resumption of the public celebration of Holy Mass will be driven by the directives of local authorities and the congregations themselves working in tandem with their Diocesan Bishop.

We are also aware that even when our parish churches open, there will be those within our communities that may be uncomfortable attending events with large groups, especially if they are in a category of individuals who have greater susceptibility. Our parishes must continue to be understanding as well as to look for other ways to engage these individuals in the ongoing life of the parish.

We are aware that these guidelines are asking each of us to sacrifice a portion of our usual spiritual and religious life and practice as we return to public worship. Things will not just go back to “normal.” In this we must remember that our Lord has taught us to sacrifice for the benefit of others. This is exactly what we are asking each member of the Church to consider. Anything that we may be giving up in our usual spiritual or religious practice, any inconvenience that we may have to deal with, is being done so that other remain safe.

It is certainly the prayer of the bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church that all remain safe and well, and each of us is always available to help the parishes of the P.N.C.C. in any way that we can.

In Christ Jesus, our Risen Lord,

Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky
Bishop John Mack
Bishop Paul Sobiechowski
Bishop Bernard Nowicki
Bishop-elect Jarosław Rafalko
Guidelines for the Reestablishing of Public Celebration of Holy Mass
in the Polish National Catholic Church
May 13, 2020

Unlike the beginnings of the suspension of public worship within the PNCC, the reestablishment of public worship will be a more gradual process and also one dependent on local situations. Each state within the US is setting its own timetables for opening, taking into account the rates of community transmission and many other factors. In each area these will be different and they will drive the reestablishment of public worship within the PNCC. Each parish should heed the directives of its state and local authorities, while always keeping in contact with its Diocesan Bishop.

When public worship is set to resume there are a number of issues that must be considered to keep everyone safe and well as they come to participate in the worship of Almighty God at Holy Mass. For these issues each parish must evaluate the number of individuals who will attend their parish church and also the size and structure of their own facilities. In this consideration the protection of all individuals through social distancing should be the kept in the fore.

From the CDC, the two most important aspects of staying safe are the application of social distancing (staying 6ft apart from other individuals) and other mitigation strategies (wearing masks, disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and avoiding touching one’s face). These two factors should drive all of the guidelines set.

Below is a partial list of considerations for each parish:

**Preparation**

1) The pastor and Parish Committee should meet in advance of any public worship within their parish church to make decisions and plan for the resumption of public Holy Masses.
2) All on the Parish Committee and others that may be chosen to help should be fully aware of how the parish will be operating in these times.
3) A number of members of the parish Committee or others must be on site during any public worship to be of help in keeping order and keeping all safe.

**Parish Congregants**

1) Before the resumption of worship, the parish must decide how many individuals can safely attend worship. They may even consider marking places where individuals can sit within the parish church, keeping in mind the 6 foot social distance. This information should be given to the parishioners and when the time comes no more than that number should be permitted within the Church.
2) There should be no distribution of any materials when people arrive. If worship items or bulletins will be given they should be placed ahead of time at places where individuals will sit.
3) Items that may be in the pews or in pew racks should be removed, including Mass Books and Hymnals. Through this there will be fewer items that could be touched and would then need to be disinfected.

4) Non-vital areas of the parish should be locked or barricaded. During the time of worship, individuals (possibly Parish Committee members) should be available to monitor individuals and provide direction when needed.

5) Arrival of parishioners – When individuals arrive for worship they should be directed to a door with someone either to escort them (keeping social distance) or direct them to the worship space. No one should congregate at the church door nor should they wander around the church building. When arriving at church, all should be wearing masks. (The parish may wish to have some on hand that will be given to the individuals should they arrive without one. They are to then take the mask home with them.) (Hand sanitizer may also be available for individuals to use.)

6) Any doors that individuals would need to pass through should be propped open. In this way these doors do not need to be touched.

7) Individuals should be seated in a methodical way, most likely from the front of the Church (farthest from the door) to the back. In this they will not pass other seated individuals. All should sit in assigned places keeping social (6ft) distance. This may include families who arrive together.

8) Before the Mass begins there should be instructions given to all individuals gathered. They should be instructed to keep their masks on through the entire service. And they also should be told what must be done if they need to leave for any reason, including using the restrooms.

9) During Holy Mass there should be no singing by the congregation. Singing causes extra expulsion of air therefore requiring extra social distance. It is also difficult to sing with a mask in place. Because of this there should be no congregational singing.

10) Likewise there should not be a choir. If there are a few singers for Mass, they should have extra social distance, (between the singers themselves and also from the rest of the congregation) especially if they are not wearing masks. There should also be a significant distance in a choir loft, if the parish has one, especially the edge. Any droplets expelled from singing from the choir loft, might descend to the congregation below. If space does not allow this, then there should be no singing at that Mass.

11) There should be no taking of a collection during the Holy Mass. A large container may be placed on the route that the individuals will take leaving church. The parish should instruct their congregation that collection envelopes or monetary donations can be dropped in that container while leaving the church. The Parish Committee should take mitigation measures into account when the time comes to count those donations.

12) After the conclusion of Holy Mass the congregation should be instructed to remain in place until they are dismissed from church. This will allow social distancing by having congregants closest to the doors leave first preserving social distancing. All should be instructed to take worship aids and bulletins (if any were given) with them.
13) The clergy should give a general greeting to all following Mass with no greetings of individuals while leaving church. No one should gather in groups following Mass or at any time.

14) If there is to be more than one Mass on a Sunday the worship area must be disinfected before the next service. This will include any doorways that people pass through, areas where they go and the restrooms.

Communion

1) At early points in the resuming of worship Holy Communion will not be distributed. In order for Communion to be distributed there would have to be a closer than 6 foot distance, so for the beginning of the resuming of public worship, the “Act of Spiritual Communion” will continue to be read at the appropriate time. As social distancing requirements are further relaxed, the distribution of Holy Communion will then begin.

2) Of course, if Holy Communion is desired by one who is going to have some medical procedure or having any spiritual need, they should contact the pastor directly and communion for that individual will be arranged apart from Mass, with the pastor taking care in using a mask and disinfecting his hands.

The Celebrant and other ministers

1) The celebrant during the liturgy should not wear a mask. It is important that the celebration of Holy Mass be communicated in a natural manner and any mask would inhibit this. Because of this the celebrant should stay significantly further away from others within the church.

2) There should be no altar servers who come into contact with the celebrant. A server can certainly ring the bells from their own seat in the congregation, but the pouring of wine and water, or the washing of hands is too close of contact. (This may be amended a little for a server who is a child of the pastor and lives with him, but it would be better to set an appropriate example for the congregation.)

3) Likewise for lectors, because they most probably will have to remove their mask to read, there should be extra social distance from all others in the church. They should also be seated in an area where they do not have to pass others to travel to the lectern. If this cannot be done safely, the celebrant should read all the lessons.

Other Church events (Meetings, Social Events and Fundraisers)

1) All parishes should follow the directives of local and state authorities in the scheduling of these events.

2) Church meetings should be held via electronic means if at all possible. If there are to be meetings they should only be of a small group with adequate social distance and everyone wearing masks.

3) Church social events, such as coffee hours, are to be postponed until such a time when the local areas have fully resumed all aspects of daily life.
4) Church fundraisers may begin to take place following the guidelines for food establishments. At the beginning they are to be only takeout events. Even in this case they should only be held if those preparing the food have been checked for any illness or contact with someone infected and also following social distancing.

5) If the parish has a ministry of feeding or helping others in need, they should seek ways to continue this ministry while keeping all safe and following local guidelines.

These guidelines are primarily given as points of thought and concern for local parishes to consider while reestablishing the public celebration of Holy Mass and parish operations. In all things the pastor and parish administration should remain in contact with their Diocesan Bishop regarding any moving forward through the phases of resuming public worship, the public celebration of Holy Mass and other parish events.

If there are any questions or concerns about these matters or if something is not covered here, the pastors and parish committees are instructed to contact their Diocesan Bishop of the Office of the Prime Bishop for direction in the ways to proceed.