

## TIMELINE FOR DIOCESE OF TRENTON RESPONSE TO COVID-19

*This timeline represents only diocesan-wide initiatives and actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., wishes to acknowledge and thank pastors, parish priests, deacons and lay staff for their heroic efforts to serve the faithful in the individual parishes throughout the four counties of the Diocese. Their outreach to the people of their own and neighboring parishes in thoughtful and creative ways have been an amazing demonstration of the power of faith, hope and love in supporting the local Church.*

2020 -----

- March 2: Instruction by Bishop (BP) sent to pastors re: liturgical practices for Mass in parishes, requesting publication on parish websites
- March 12: BP celebrates last public confirmation of 2019-20 season at St. Catherine Laboure parish in Middletown
- BP grants dispensation from obligation to attend Mass on Sundays or Holy Days
- March 13: Catholic schools and Religious Ed programs closed by NJ Governor for 2 weeks
- March 14: BP reaches out to all retired priests over 65 and advises them not to celebrate parish Masses or attend public gatherings during the pandemic
- March 15: BP postpones parish confirmations indefinitely
- March 16: BP permits priests to celebrate private Masses without server
- March 17: BP releases messages to Diocese "On Measures to Mitigate Spread of COVID-19" and "God is Always Present Among Us"
- BP mandates social distance protocols; sets "preference" (not requirement) for distributing/receiving communion in hand; communion on tongue still permitted; gives instruction for confessions as needed observing social distancing and using good pastoral judgment; suspends public gatherings for devotions in churches
- March 18: BP invites Diocese to join Pope in rosary at 4 pm March 19
- Diocesan Chrism Mass postponed until Pentecost Sunday; all priests are directed to renew priestly commitments on April 6, the date originally established for Chrism Mass and Renewal, and to livestream Mass wherever possible
- March 19: BP reaches out to all religious women in consecrated life
- March 20: BP distributes Diocesan pandemic guidelines for Holy Week and Easter 2020 celebrations without a congregation, and mandates posting on Diocesan/parish

websites; prohibits general absolution; provides further guidance to parishes regarding finances

BP writes again to the faithful and releases videotaped message

- March 23: Mercer CYO announces pandemic plans
- March 25: BP invites Diocese to join Pope in pandemic prayer service online March 27
- March 26: BP establishes Diocesan on-line COVID relief donations for Diocese/parishes
- March 27: BP encourages parishes, schools, organizations and agencies to begin application process for "Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)" established by CARES Act in collaboration with the Diocesan Finance Office
- March 29: Diocese announces and publishes financial/employment policies affecting all diocesan employees
- March 30: BP sends parishes guidelines for pastoral care and Anointing of the Sick
- April 1: BP closes all churches, chapels and public buildings in Diocese; Baptisms, weddings and funerals to be postponed indefinitely; burials permitted in Catholic cemeteries with only 10 persons permitted; BP sends notice to all priests re: diocesan/parish food pantries and food banks
- April 5-12: BP celebrates Holy Week Masses, liturgies livestreamed from St. Rose Church in Belmar, as parishes make similar arrangements
- April 6: Presbyterate renews priestly commitments with BP at private livestreamed Masses throughout the Diocese In lieu of usual ceremony at Chrism Mass
- April 8: Diocese publishes procedures for FEMA grant applications for all churches, schools and non-profits
- April 11: BP releases videotaped message to the faithful
- April 14: BP announces dates of priest transfers still July 1
- April 17: BP announces rescheduling directives for Confirmations/RCIA and Rite of Full Reception celebrations on or before November 29, First Sunday of Advent
- April 24: BP announces directions for hospital and nursing home sacraments; announces live-streamed reconsecration of US Church to Mary, Mother of the Church May 1, 3 pm
- BP writes again to the faithful

- May 1: BP celebrates Mass for all Frontline and First Responder Workers livestreamed at St. Joseph parish in Toms River
- BP reconsecrates Diocese livestreamed to Mary, Mother of the Church in Mary, Mother of the Church parish in Bordentown
- May 3: BP establishes Post-Pandemic Parish Task Force for Pastors (P4) to establish common diocesan guidelines for gradually restoring public Masses and Sacraments
- May 4: Catholic schools and Religious Education programs closed for the remainder of the academic year
- BP writes again to the faithful
- May 8: BP announces reopening of churches In Diocese for private prayer, observing mandated masks and social distance guidelines May 13, 9 am
- May 12: BP videotapes HS Baccalaureate Mass and homily for use in Diocese
- May 13: BP celebrates 11 am livestreamed Mass for public health officials, healthcare professionals, frontline emergency personnel and first responders in Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Keyport
- Parishes reopen for private prayer with pandemic precautions observed
- May 15: BP announces outdoor and in-car Masses and establishes guidelines beginning May 18; NJ Bishops transfer Ascension Thursday Masses to May 24, 2020 only
- May 18: Outdoor and in-car parish Masses begin in the Diocese wherever possible
- May 20: BP announces online Memorial Mass for all faithful departed of the Diocese throughout pandemic, June 17, 2 pm in St. Ann Mausoleum in Spring Lake: BP celebrates videotaped Baccalaureate Mass in St. Dominic Church in Brick
- May 28: BP announces news re: public in-church Masses TBA at livestreamed Mass in St. Barnabas Church in Bayville
- May 29: BP releases Pandemic Task Force Diocesan Directives for limited public in-church Masses and sacraments
- June 1: Chrism Mass celebrated and holy oils blessed and consecrated livestreamed on Pentecost Sunday in St. Robert Bellarmine Co-Cathedral, Freehold
- June 8: Weekday public in-church Masses begin with pandemic precautions observed
- June 13-14: Weekend public in-church Masses begin with pandemic precautions observed

- June 15: BP contacts all pastors to learn how weekend Masses went
- June 17: BP celebrates livestream Memorial Mass in St. Ann Mausoleum
- June 20: 6 Deacons ordained by BP at restricted Mass in Co-Cathedral, Freehold  
Diocese releases video on "Restoration of Public Masses"
- June 22: Pandemic Task Force updates May 29 Diocesan Directives and BP contacts all pastors to learn how second weekend Masses went
- June 27: Priest ordained by BP at restricted Mass at Co-Cathedral, Freehold
- July 6: Chancery re-opens at 50% occupancy and staggered schedule begins July 7: Chancery cancels Friday workdays until after Labor Day
- July 13: Superintendent informs DOT School parents that NJ Diocesan Catholic School Superintendents are preparing "Guidelines for Reopening Catholic Schools" to be released on August 21
- July 17: BP sends priests reminder about COVID protocols for indoor Masses
- July 30: BP extends Sunday Mass dispensation "until further notice"
- August 13: Diocese issues "Advisory Regarding Return to School"
- August 21: "Guidelines for Reopening Catholic Schools" released by NJ Catholic School Superintendents
- September 8: Catholic schools begin to open in-person, virtually or hybrid
- September 11: Pandemic Task Force updates June 22 update of May 29 Diocesan Directives
- September 14: BP releases videotaped "Back to School Message" at St. Joseph Parish and School in Toms River
- September 18: Pandemic Task Force releases DOT Directives for the "Celebration of the Christmas Season in the Time of Pandemic;" BP responds affirmatively to question re: validity of using cotton balls or Q tips in Confirmation ceremony
- October 13: BP writes again to the faithful
- October 15: Diocese releases Catholic Schools Mass and homily by BP
- October 19: BP releases further pandemic directives for Christmas Masses
- November 10: BP releases videotaped message to the faithful

November 20: BP announces indulgent of the Holy See to celebrate multiple (4) Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

November 23: BP publishes Vatican and USCCB statements on moral legitimacy of use of COVID Pfizer and Moderna vaccines

2021-----

January 5: BP delegates pastors to conduct Rite of Election for RCIA Candidates on February 21

January 11: Pandemic Task Force releases pandemic directives for February 1 through Holy Week 2021

January 15: BP releases message to encourage vaccinations

January 22: Diocese broadcasts Pro-Life Message of BP for Young People to all Catholic schools

January 29: Office of Worship sends pandemic directives restricting distribution of ashes in hospitals, nursing homes and private homes

Diocese broadcasts pandemic Pro-Life Mass and homily by BP

February 1: Diocese broadcasts pandemic Catholic Schools Week Mass and homily by BP

February 3: BP sends pandemic directives update for Ash Wednesday for Diocese

February 6: Diocese broadcasts virtual Diocesan Youth Conference

February 8: BP grants general delegation to all pastors for Easter Vigil RCIA Confirmations

February 16: Chancellor notifies pastors regarding indoor gatherings for non-liturgical activities

February 17: Diocese broadcasts pandemic Ash Wednesday Liturgical Service and homily by BP

BP contacts pastors regarding reaction to distribution of ashes in parishes and sends follow-up report

February 20: BP celebrates Mass that was livestreamed nationally for Catholic Men for Jesus Christ Conference

February 21: Rite of Election is conducted in the parishes by the pastors, as delegated by BP on Jan. 5, 2021, due to pandemic

March 12: BP begins Spring Confirmations under COVID protocols while delegating pastors to share schedule

March 16: Diocese releases video of BP's message promoting access to vaccinations through Catholic Charities, especially among minority populations

March 28 -- April 3: BP travels to five different parish communities to celebrate Masses, liturgies during Holy Week that were livestreamed by diocesan media