

Important Announcement



The Reopening of St. Helen of the Cross & Resumption of Public Mass September 5 & 6, 2020

OVERVIEW

At this time, we remain amid a pandemic, which is unprecedented in our lifetime. While the desire to resume parish life quickly and completely is understandable, we nevertheless must be prudent and thoughtful in how we go about the resumption of the public celebration of Mass.

Bishop Wiesenberger, in consultation with Diocesan leadership and experts in public health, has directed all the parishes to implement health and safety protocols which are consistent with the protocols issued by the State of Arizona and the Centers for Disease Control.

Catholic churches throughout the diocese will reopen in three phases. When and how we move from phase one to phase two to phase three will be driven by how the pandemic is affecting Arizona.

St. Helen of the Cross has submitted a comprehensive COVID-19 safety and infection control plan to the Diocese of Tucson and has been certified by the Bishop to resume the public celebration of Mass. The safety and infection control plan can be found in the Emergency Plan Manual located in the church and parish hall.

Phase One is enumerated below:

PHASE I

Public celebration of Mass will resume on the weekend of September 5 & 6, 2020

Parish Masses will be limited to 20 percent of the seating capacity of the church (approximately 80 people) to ensure proper social distancing.

- Only the front door will be used for entering and exiting the church. The side doors will be for emergency use only.
- Ushers will escort you to the pews designated for the number of people in your family.
- At the end of Mass, ushers will coordinate, by row, your departure from the church.
- You and your family will be more than six feet from the next closest person or family. Families wanting to be seated together **MUST** arrive at the church at the same time.
- Seating in the pews will begin 30 minutes prior to the start of Mass to assure a prompt start of Mass. You are urged to arrive early. The seating capacity in the church is limited to approximately 80 people.
- Congregants over the age of two and who have no trouble breathing are required to wear a face mask. Anyone required to wear a mask who does not comply will not be allowed to enter the Church. If you have a medical condition that would prohibit you from wearing a mask you must come into the office, with the proper medical exception from your doctor, prior to attending your first Mass. A copy of the document will be kept in the office for our records. If you have a medical condition that prohibits you from wearing a mask, we highly encourage you to take advantage of on-line services. If you have **Note:** Read below the Bishop's statement about the wearing of face masks.
- Please respect the signs posted at the church entrance indicating the church is at full capacity and that you need to return for a later-scheduled Mass.

We will be returning to our regular Mass Schedule:

Saturday Vigil 4:15 PM (English)

Sunday 9:00 AM (English)

 11:00 AM (Spanish)

Note: Confession will not be available on Saturdays at 3:00pm. We will continue to offer Confessions on the last Tuesday and Thursday of the month at 7:00pm in the garden area behind the office. Our ministry to the Homebound is also suspended until further notice as is the Holy Rosary services normally prayed before each Mass are temporarily suspended.

The following six protocols developed prior to the suspension of public Mass will remain in force until further notice:

- i. Holy Water fonts will remain empty. Ushers will prop open the front door of the church for congregants upon entering. You will not have to touch a door handle.
- ii. Parishioners are to express the “Sign of Peace” at Mass in a way that does not involve human touch, such as a small bow.
- iii. Pastors are to urge all parishioners to wash hands frequently. Special Ministers of Holy Communion (Eucharistic Ministers) are to wash their hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion and to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. The wearing of face masks by Eucharistic Ministers is required.
- iv. Pastors are to suspend the use of the Chalice for the congregation.
- v. Pastors are to ensure a thorough cleansing of all Communion vessels after each Mass.
- vi. Congregations are to suspend holding hands during the Our Father Prayer, for those parishes where this may be a local custom.

The Wearing of Face Masks is Required. The use of a face mask is a sign of our desire to do our part in helping to prevent others from potential contagion. As our clergy are repeatedly in our churches, in the words of Bishop Weisenburger, ***“The use of a mask is an especially strong sign of your support for your priests and ministers”***.

Safe Environment — A plan for disinfecting those parts of the church used by parishioners, especially the pews and bathrooms, following each Mass is critical and will be done by a team of parish volunteers. **Note:** Only industrial-strength solvents capable of killing the coronavirus will be used as a disinfectant.

The Elderly & At-Risk — All parishioners who qualify as vulnerable individuals are strongly urged to continue to shelter in place and not make in-person visits to church. The definition “vulnerable persons” are those over the age of 65 or vulnerable due to a health condition associated with COVID-19 (respiratory, diabetes, heart, immune deficiency). **Note:** Those living with vulnerable persons should avoid coming onto parish campus out of concern for bringing the virus back to their homes.

The Sunday Obligation — All persons living in or visiting Eloy, or other church in the Diocese of Tucson, are indefinitely excused from the Sunday Mass obligation. **Note:** Those living with vulnerable persons should avoid coming onto the parish campus out of concern for bringing the virus back to their homes.

Funerals, Weddings & Weekday Masses — There will be no gatherings or events on the parish campus other than weekend Masses, funerals, and weddings. All of these events/services in phase one are limited the same as Mass, that being 20 percent of capacity (approximately 80 people) and vulnerable persons are strongly discouraged from participating. **Note:** weekday Masses, meetings, or other in-person parish events are not an option at this time. Until further notice, there will not be any events held in our Parish Hall. The Hall will be unavailable for rent.

Parish Campus — While on the parish campus, all persons must maintain strict social distancing protocols; this entails maintaining approximately six feet of space between unrelated persons including when indoors. Wearing a face mask is required.

Eucharistic Ministers — Eucharistic Ministers must adhere to all protocols including the use of hand-sanitizers as well as the use of facemasks. **Note:** Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion shall NOT be from the vulnerable population.

Holy Communion — Holy Communion will be offered out-of-doors, following the final blessing and dismissal from Mass—as you are leaving. As the situation stabilizes, a return to receiving Holy Communion indoors may become increasingly appropriate. **Note:** Holy Communion, in this early phase, will be given only in the hand. At the initial Masses, we will demonstrate how to hold your hands in the form of a cup so that the Eucharist may be gently dropped from the hand of the Minister into the cupped hands of the recipient—avoiding hand-to-hand contact. It's another safety measure to keep you and your family as safe a reasonably possible.

Weekly Mass Offering — The traditional way of receiving your generous weekly offering in support of the parish, we be collected at the end of Mass as you depart. A collection basket will be strategically placed by the exit door.

Hymnals & Congregational Singing — Because singing puts an infinitely greater number of contagion droplets in the air, hymnals and congregational singing is suspended until further notice. Missals and Hymn books will be removed from the church until further notice.

Are You Feeling Ill? — If you are feeling ill, no matter the symptoms, you are urged, in the strongest sense, to remain at home and not come onto parish property.

Added Safety Measures — **1]** The church will be entirely closed on Monday through Thursday, except for funerals, to allow any potential contagion left behind on a surface to die. **2]** The chapel, because of its confined area, will be closed until further notice. **3]** The office will be open on a limited bases, due to staff shortages. Please call and leave a message on the phone and someone will call you back as soon as possible. In the event of a life or death emergency and you need a Priest please call (520) 466- 1461.

What to Volunteer? As you can imagine, the guidelines to keep everyone safe is a daunting task. Many of our **Lectors** and **Eucharistic Ministers** are over 65. Keeping our Church open will depend on having enough volunteers to assist with seating, ministering and disinfecting. Please help us keep you safe! Choose a Mass you normally attend and serve in one or both of these spiritually rewarding positions and become part of the Mass. Training will be provided. It's remarkably easy. Choose the Mass you usually attend.

Interested? Email StHelensatEloy@Gmail.com Place in the Subject line "**Count Me In**" and in the body of the message your telephone number.

Interaction with the Priests — Priests throughout the diocese will not be shaking hands or making physical contact with parishioners.

One Final Cautionary Note — As your pastor, I want to assure you that the parish will undertake comprehensive measures to keep you reasonably safe. As outlined throughout the reopening plan, every reasonable effort will be undertaken to keep our beloved church free from the scourge of COVID-19. A team of volunteers is ready to serve you. Social distancing guidelines are in place and will be adhered to at every Mass you attend. But let's also be realistic. During these unprecedented times, there is an inherent risk, regardless of your age, of attending any public event. This includes religious services. Going to the grocery store is a risk. No one — no organization, public or private — can be guaranteed absolute safety, and that only you, as faithful Catholic, need to acknowledge the inherent risk before returning to the public celebration of Mass. **Important:** Your presence at a public event constitutes your understanding and acceptance of this essential level of risk.

Stay Current — The Diocese of Tucson is closely monitoring COVID-19 developments. As events warrant and changes are made, they will be communicated immediately to you. You can also receive current information from: diocesetucson.org

To receive immediate updates, "Follow" the parish Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/St.Helen.of.the.Cross>

Or visit the parish website at <http://sthelenchurch.com/>

Questions, clarifications or concerns about the phase one reopening? Please call the office or they can be directed to the parish email address at St.HelensatEloy@Gmail.com

May God bless you and keep you safe.

Fr. Marco Carrasco, St. Helen of the Cross