
COVID-19 Coronavirus: Switzerland, pending go-ahead from Federal Council, Bishops finalise plan for Masses in times of pandemic

Careful hand washing and disinfection with a provided antimicrobial sanitizer before entering the church; orderly entry into the church, and most importantly, limited access and possibly a “booking system with numbered seats”; prohibition to pass around the collection basket during the offertory and abolishment of the sign of peace. The way we receive Communion will also change: the priest and the faithful will no longer say: “The Body of Christ” and “Amen”. These words will be pronounced collectively by the assembly before the distribution of the Eucharist, and the Eucharistic ministers should disinfect their hands thoroughly before giving the host to the faithful. These are just “some” of the rules laid down by the Swiss Bishops’ Conference in the “Protection Plan for Public Masses”, which should pave the way for the resumption of celebrations at a date that is still to be determined. On 16 April, the Federal Council had announced a plan to ease the restrictions imposed in response to the coronavirus, in three stages: 27 April, 11 May, 8 June. A statement from the Swiss Bishops clearly explains that the staged plan does not currently allow for the resumption of Masses. The Swiss Bishops’ Conference supports “the hope of many faithful that public Masses can be celebrated again soon”, but also insists that “protective measures are necessary and prudent to finally normalize, in a gradual and responsible manner, the ecclesial and spiritual life of our country”. As from 27 April, only funerals kept as simple as possible and celebrated in the family circle are permitted. In their statement, under point B, the Swiss Bishops address in detail the reopening of churches, and even if a date has not yet been announced, they provide a clear list of rules that will have to be respected. The measures announced in the plan are divided into three parts: before, during and after Mass. The entry of the faithful into the church will be regulated, as well as their position inside, so as to avoid contacts and gatherings. The guidelines to follow are clear, even during the celebration: from the readings, to the choir, to the collection and the distribution of the Eucharist. Rules were also laid down on how to exit the church at the end of Mass: the faithful should do it in an orderly manner so as to keep distancing and avoid gatherings. There will be crowd marshals to help the faithful and ensure compliance with the rules. After Mass, all possible contaminated surfaces (objects, benches, doors, lavatories) will be thoroughly disinfected. Finally, under point 4, the plan urges people at risk or sick not to attend Sunday Mass and appeals to all the faithful to “do all they can to limit this pandemic”.

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