

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



For these past 16 months, Catholics in the Diocese of Allentown have not been obligated to attend Mass due to the risks of the pandemic.

I joined with the other Bishops in Pennsylvania in March 2020 to dispense the faithful from their normal Mass obligation as part of a series of extraordinary public health measures taken during the difficult days of infection risk.

Now, we thank God that conditions are much improved. Vaccination rates are rising, and nearly all Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted. Life is starting to return to normal as people feel comfortable enough to share a meal in a restaurant, to go shopping, to attend sporting events, and to socialize with others.

As these other things in life return to normal, it also is time for us to resume our normal lives as faithful Catholics.

Acting in concert with the other Bishops in our Commonwealth, I have determined that beginning **August 15**, all Catholics in the Diocese of Allentown will once again be obligated to attend Mass on weekends and on holy days of obligation.

I recognize that the pandemic is not completely over. I understand that a new variant of the virus is causing concern, primarily in other states and countries, and primarily among those who have not been vaccinated. I know, too, that there still can be much anxiety associated with the Coronavirus pandemic, including uncertainty about the future.

However, I also recognize — and I truly hope you do as well — that the Holy Eucharist is the anchor of our parish and diocesan life. The Holy Eucharist, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, cannot be received virtually at home, nor can the Blessed Sacrament be received through Spiritual Communion. Except for the sick and homebound, Holy Communion can only be received when we are really present at Mass, to experience the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. During this Year of the Real Presence in our Diocese, more and more people have been returning to Mass. More and more people have been celebrating the great privilege of receiving the Holy Eucharist along with friends, family, and fellow parishioners.

We are praying for Vocations before the Holy Eucharist at Adoration. The faithful have been expressing their joy at having again the precious, intimate encounter with our Eucharistic Lord.

If you have not yet returned to Mass, now is the time to come home to your parish and be present at the Altar of Sacrifice.

Broadcast Masses were a necessary precautionary step during the pandemic, and they will continue to bring comfort to the ill and homebound. Participating remotely simply cannot become the norm for those of us able to go about daily business.

It is always the case that those who are ill, those who believe they have been exposed to a contagious disease, those who feel they are medically compromised, and those confined to their homes, are not obligated to attend Mass. This standard dispensation will continue.

In this *Year of the Real Presence*, I ask every parishioner to invite at least one person back to in-person attendance at Mass. This can be someone who was not attending Mass before the pandemic, or someone who has not yet returned to Mass now that the pandemic has eased.

Please join me in continuing to pray for everyone affected by the pandemic, and for everyone who has worked tirelessly to make this time of difficulty easier for the rest of us.

I am deeply grateful to our clergy, religious, teachers, and medical personnel, who courageously maintained the services of our parishes, schools, and institutions.

Wishing you joy, courage, and a deepening of your faith in the Real Presence of the Holy Eucharist,

I am  
Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alfred A. Schlert" with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert  
Bishop of Allentown