

## Protocols for Offering Masses and Providing Other Parish Ministry Updated October 28, 2020

### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

In order to celebrate public Masses and offer parish ministry programs, parishes must follow the directives and work within the guidelines outlined in this document. These directives and guidelines continue to remain in force until further notice or changes by the State allow for or require additional revision. It is important to remember that these directives and guidelines are not intended to be permanent adjustments to normal practice but temporary responses to the pandemic. Your patience, understanding and cooperation are appreciated as the pandemic persists.

Due to different circumstances at each parish, the regulation of reopening is left to the prudential judgment of the pastor, operating within Archdiocesan protocols and State mandates. Charity and understanding are asked of all the faithful as pastors ensure the observance of all the changing protocols and requirements at Masses and other activities. One parish may not be able to offer the same opportunities as a neighboring parish due to size, space limitations or other circumstances (e.g. local COVID positive cases, underlying health condition of pastor, etc.). In all cases, a pastor should communicate clearly and frequently with his parishioners about his plan, the process used for sign-ups and other details about attending Masses and other activities.

The Pastoral Center will serve as a resource to pastors and parishes as they offer ministry during the pandemic. The staff of the Pastoral Ministries and Clergy Departments will be available for each parish to consult, request assistance, discuss plans, share ideas and ask questions about offering Masses prudently and safely. Email: [DPM@archdpx.org](mailto:DPM@archdpx.org).

### **General Principles Regarding Masses**

- Pastors/Administrators of parishes will have the final decision on what can and may be done in their specific churches when offering Masses.
- Mass attendance will be limited in accord with government directives (e.g. 50, 100, 250).
- **In Phase 1 counties**, Masses and faith-based groups are considered to be “gatherings.” The guidance currently allows parishes to accommodate up to 50 persons indoors for Mass. Outdoor church gatherings in Phase 1 can also have up to 50 people. (See Guidance [HERE](#))
- **In Phase 2 counties**, a Mass or other grouping is considered to be a “venue” or “event.” “Venue or event operators” can allow 100 persons indoors at each Mass. Outdoor church gatherings can number up to 250 people. (See Guidance [HERE](#)).

Note: There has been confusion because the Guidance for Gatherings also says that gatherings in Phase 2 Counties are limited to 50 indoors and 100 outdoors. However, we have been told by state authorities on multiple occasions that the

proper guidance to be applied to religious or faith gatherings in Phase 2 is the one for venues and events.

- Physical distancing must always be practiced within churches (minimum of six feet apart except for members of the same household).
- A general dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation remains in place.
- Anyone attending Mass does so at his/her own risk. Vulnerable, at-risk and otherwise concerned persons should remain at home.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms or feelings of sickness must remain home.
- Livestreaming of Masses will continue to be encouraged.
- Restrictions and guidelines here pertain to all Masses, including funerals, and to the administration of all sacraments (baptisms, confirmations, weddings, etc.)
- If a parish is unable for practical or other reasons to strictly enforce the wearing of face coverings, maintaining physical distancing and performing the cleaning requirements as indicated in this document, the parish cannot offer public Masses.

### **Sign-Ups**

Priests are permitted to offer two Masses during weekdays (morning and evening) and additional Masses on the weekends to allow as many people as possible to have the opportunity to attend Holy Mass and receive the Eucharist in a given period. The Mass schedule should be published. The normal approval process for adding/dropping or otherwise changing the parish Mass schedule is suspended until public gathering restrictions are eliminated or until further notice. Please send your Mass schedule, including the changes, to your area vicar with a courtesy copy to the Vicar for Clergy.

Pastors and staff are still required to employ a sign-up system for attending Holy Mass. It is recommended that parishes solicit the names of all the faithful in their community who would like to attend Holy Mass. A database or list should be kept. The first and last name of each person who wishes to attend should be collected, along with a phone number or email for them.

A first-come, first-served system as well as exclusively online or email sign-up systems should be avoided. These methods might exclude many who otherwise would wish to attend (e.g. those disabled, without Internet access or technical savvy). Multiple and easily accessible ways of sign-up should be employed. For example, through a combination of methods including online sign-ups, email, phone calls and written sign-ups. Or, a phone call only sign-up method could work.

Individuals/families will be allowed to attend Sunday Mass only once in a given period as determined by the pastor (one week, two weeks, three weeks or four weeks), depending upon the size of the community. This is to allow as many people in the parish as possible the opportunity to attend Sunday Mass. Since the Sunday Mass obligation remains lifted, it is not a canonical violation not to attend Mass on Sundays.

The faithful are asked to sign-up for Mass at only one parish.

Parishes are discouraged from verifying whether an individual who signs-up for their Mass rotation is registered or otherwise from their parish.

Depending upon the system, sign-ups might allow the faithful to choose the Mass they prefer to attend or indicate if there are specific Mass times they cannot attend.

The pastor will determine how best to assign specific names to specific Mass times. Every sense of fairness must be maintained. Aside from those with special needs, any preferential treatment should be avoided.

A record of the list of those who signed-up and attended each Mass must be maintained for 60 days. In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, the parish may be called upon to assist public officials with contacting those who may have been exposed.

Mass organizers should remember that the maximum number allowed includes the priest, liturgical ministers, livestream videographers and anyone else present during Mass. For this reason, the total number of ministers/volunteers should be reduced to a minimum. A celebrant may want to limit the use of choirs and use cantors instead.

### **Face Coverings (Latest Guidance [HERE](#))**

Face coverings or masks are legally required at indoor and outdoor gatherings, including in churches, per statewide directive. All who are 5 years and up must wear face coverings in church in Phases 1 and 2 of reopening (ages 2-4 are urged to wear them). Wearing a face covering at church is not optional. Churchgoers cannot be allowed entrance without a face covering. The pastor and door monitor must strictly enforce this requirement.

Note: Face shields are no longer recommended as a substitute for face coverings because they permit the aerosols to move around the shield.

We are interpreting the guidance to say that wearing a face covering while presiding at Mass or reading at Mass is “not feasible” and therefore should be excepted. However, we recommend that priests and lectors wear a face covering when not engaged in preaching or actually celebrating the Mass (i.e., when seated while the readings are being proclaimed).

Singers are not exempt and must wear face coverings even while singing. Musicians must do so as well unless wearing a face covering would be “infeasible” (i.e., when playing a wind instrument).

Exceptions are made for people with disabilities or diagnosed medical conditions that preclude them from wearing face coverings. In these few cases, special accommodations should be made so those unable to wear face coverings have seating in a closed cry room or choir loft away from the rest of the congregation. Such persons can also use face shields as an alternative.

A hospitality minister or monitor must be enlisted to ensure that face coverings are worn by all attendees at Masses.

## **Physical/Social Distancing**

Except for members of the same household, the faithful must always remain at least six feet apart during Mass.

The formula for determining how many people can be allowed in an indoor space is: one person is allowed for every 35 square feet of space, up to the maximum number of people determined by the Governor.

Masses should normally be conducted in the church. The offering of Masses should take place in strict accord with the directives and numbers allowed by the State. Parking lot or open-air Masses to expand the celebration numbers for Masses are not envisioned at this time.

## **Holy Communion**

1. Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers must wear masks/face coverings while they are distributing Holy Communion.
2. Physical distancing must be maintained during the Communion procession.
3. Single file Communion lines only, with six feet of distance between each person. Members of the same household need not observe physical distancing with one another during the Communion procession.
4. Great care must be taken by ministers when distributing Holy Communion. Skin to skin contact should be carefully avoided. If contact is made, the priest or Extraordinary Minister should sanitize their hands before continuing distribution. As some who are present may perceive reception of Holy Communion on the tongue as a greater risk to safety, those who wish to receive on the tongue are kindly asked to wait until the end of the line to present themselves for Holy Communion.
5. Ministers of Holy Communion are encouraged to sanitize their hands immediately after receiving Holy Communion themselves and prior to distributing Holy Communion to the faithful.
6. If a priest has underlying health conditions or is otherwise unable, he may have Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion distribute in his place: "Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion" (*Ecclesia de Mysterio* 8.2).
7. Holy Communion is to be distributed by hand in the normal fashion. Ministers may not use gloves (or devices or instruments) to distribute Holy Communion.

## **Liturgical practices which are currently proscribed:**

- 1.No Sign of Peace
2. No distribution of the Precious Blood
3. No holy water in fonts
4. Sunday Masses can only be offered beginning at 4pm on Saturday through Midnight on Sunday. Sunday Masses cannot be offered on weekdays.

5. No collection is taken during the Mass (instead, baskets can be placed near the entrance or in another accessible location).
6. No presentation of the gifts by the faithful.

**In addition, the following must be observed:**

1. All missalettes, pew cards, pencils and other loose items in the pews must be removed.
2. As noted above, collection baskets cannot be passed from person to person or otherwise presented to the faithful. Collection baskets can be placed in an accessible location (e.g. near the entrance of the church) with someone assigned to monitor them.
3. One-time use worship aids and bulletins may be used, so long as they are distributed to the faithful in a manner that minimizes contact or potential spread of the virus (i.e., they can be taken home after Mass or recycled).

**Entrances and Exits**

1. Churches should designate one place of entrance when possible in order to control the numbers of people coming in. At least one entrance should be accessible to those who are mobility impaired (a separate door monitor may be needed). Once the maximum is reached, no one else can be allowed entrance. Entrance monitor(s) will be needed. Only those on the list can enter unless there is space available and the faithful sign up immediately prior to entering the church or satellite location. The maximum number allowed must never be exceeded. The maximum number includes the priest, ministers, livestream videographers and anyone else in the space during Mass and monitoring the entrance.
2. People who do not sign up, but simply show up for Mass may need to be turned away at the entrance. If this happens, they should be given a number to call or otherwise given a way to add their name(s) to the sign-up list for Mass. Please be pastorally sensitive but firm in turning them away. The maximum number allowed by law must never be exceeded.
3. When possible, entrance doors should be propped open as people enter so the faithful do not need to touch the handles or doors to enter. They can be closed when Mass begins.
4. When possible, multiple exits should be used at the end of Mass to expedite departure and minimize chances of people encountering one another. In all cases, physical distancing must be observed.
5. When possible, exit doors should be propped open after Mass to allow the faithful to exit without touching the doors or handles.
6. Celebrant must maintain physical distance and wear a mask if greeting people after Mass.

**Cleaning and Sanitizing**

1. Cleaning and sanitizing of common use areas will take place after every Mass.
2. Pastors will need to organize volunteers to clean and sanitize the pews and other common use areas, including restrooms, immediately after Mass.
3. To the extent possible, sanitizing solution or wipes should be provided to the faithful upon entrance & exit.

4. After they have been purified, Communion vessels should be washed with soap and water following each Mass.

### **Use of Satellite Sites**

State authorities have given permission for use of separate, satellite gatherings on the same parish campus. These locations must observe the legal limits and requirements for faith gatherings. The gathering limit includes those distributing Holy Communion and the entrance monitor/satellite site coordinator(s). Use of satellite locations is not required or expected. It is optional and at the pastor's discretion.

To use a satellite location, a parish must have additional indoor space(s) that can comfortably hold the permitted number of people with enough room for the required 6-foot physical distancing between people (35 square feet per person is required by the State). It must be able to livestream the Mass taking place in the main church to the satellite location. In addition, parishes offering satellite sites must adhere to the following:

- Limit the numbers in the satellite space to what is permitted for faith gatherings in the county.
- An entrance monitor/satellite site coordinator for each site must be appointed to ensure satellite sites do not exceed the gathering limit and that physical distancing is maintained throughout the Holy Mass.
- Maintain physical distancing of at least 6-feet between those gathered.
- Clean the satellite location(s) between each Mass.
- Keep each group completely separated. Attendees in satellite location(s) must have separate, designated entrances and exits from those in the church or elsewhere.
- The groups cannot use the same restrooms or the same spaces (i.e. entrances, exits, lobbies, hallways, kitchens, social halls, etc.)
- At Communion time, a minister of Holy Communion (ordinary or extraordinary) who is wearing a mask, will go from the church to the satellite location to distribute Holy Communion. This minister is counted toward the limit in the satellite location and would not normally be the same person distributing in the church. After distributing, the minister will return to the church.
- Insofar as possible, parking for each group must be separate, even if in the same lot.
- More than one satellite location can be used by a parish so long as all requirements and instructions are observed.

### **Parish Practical Considerations**

The following are suggestions and guidelines for the pastor and parishes:

- Have adequate stock of hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies available.
- Physical distancing policy should be posted on the church doors.
- Ensure liturgical ministers observe physical distancing to the extent possible when performing their ministries.
- SEATING: Restrict seating (e.g. every other pew or row of seats), to maintain distancing. Seating to be used should be clearly marked.
- Restroom use and cleaning policy must be developed by each parish. For example, one at a time only may use restrooms, and restrooms are cleaned immediately following each Mass.

- Parish cry-rooms may need to be closed or restricted to one family or a person with a diagnosed condition who is unable to wear a face covering. If they are used, they will need to be cleaned after use.
- Parish child-care during Masses should be discontinued until further notice.
- Signs could be placed on church doors to indicate the Mass schedule and provide a telephone number and email address for people wanting to put their names on a list to attend Mass.
- Social gatherings before or after Mass (including coffee & donuts) should not take place.
- The pastor must ensure effective and clear communication with his parishioners about the process used for sign-ups and other details about reopening Masses.
- In some cases, a smaller parish in a vicariate may be in position to assist a larger parish by allowing people from the larger parish to sign-up for some of its Masses. This should be coordinated by the pastors in consultation with the area vicar.

### **What to do if there is a Reported Exposure or Outbreak**

- “Exposure” to COVID-19, for the purpose of case investigation and contact tracing, has been defined by public health officials as spending 15 minutes or more within six feet of a person. If Archdiocesan protocols are followed, “exposure” to the virus should not take place at any public Masses.
- If someone who attended a Mass tests positive for COVID-19, health officials may contact the parish to let the pastor know. Unless directed by public officials, it is not necessary to contact those who attended the same Mass.
- If you learn the identity of someone who tested positive for COVID-19, their name must not be shared with anyone as it is protected health information.
- In the case of an outbreak, the parish may be called upon by public officials to help them contact the people who were at the Mass where the outbreak occurred. A private outbreak is defined as two or more cases. A public outbreak is defined as 20 or more confirmed/presumptive cases.
- If a temporary closure is required, let parishioners and employees know when parish activities and services will resume, and be sure to communicate any extra steps taken to clean the building and keep people safe.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** Advice from health authorities has been changing quickly. In the event of exposure or outbreak, instruction received from a government health authority will take precedence over the above guidelines.

### **Home Visits to Parishioners**

Protocols for bringing Holy Communion to the homebound were updated in August (see memorandum [HERE](#)). If a parishioner requests a visit to attend to a sick family member, a house blessing or other need, this may be done provided that the following guidelines are followed:

- The priest or minister and all participants must wear face coverings.
- Physical distancing must be maintained, except when close contact is required, as with anointing of the sick.
- Skin contact should be avoided, and handwashing carefully observed.

- The number of persons present for home visits should be limited to 10.

### **Other Activities**

• Other parish activities and faith gatherings should follow the same instructions as those provided for Masses. All parish activities must always observe public directives, especially masking and physical distancing requirements. The same number limitations that apply to Masses must also be enforced for parish gatherings of other types and attendee names and contact information must be collected. Examples would be RCIA, adult and youth faith formation, youth ministry, retreats, lectures and the like. We are not encouraging social gatherings (coffee and doughnuts, parties, etc.) as these are limited to 10 people and there are specific requirements for serving food.

Note: We are interpreting religious instruction, especially for children, to be regulated by the guidance on gatherings and venues, not the guidance on “Youth Programs.”

- Area vicars will be asked to provide support and help monitor Masses and activities in their vicariates. Coordination by vicariate is important.
- Pastors in a vicariate should communicate their plans for offering Masses and other activities to their area vicar