



# LITURGICAL GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS FOR RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC MASSES Catholic Diocese of Saginaw + May 15, 2020

## INTRODUCTION

Last week, the Diocese of Saginaw released guidelines and protocols outlining ways to celebrate Mass and the Sacraments during the time of suspended public celebrations of the liturgical life of the Church. These guidelines and protocols were Phase One of four phases to be rolled out as we begin to open our churches for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments.

It is our plan to **begin offering public Mass on Monday, May 25, 2020** in parishes that are prepared to do so. The leadership of each parish must determine if the proper protocols and procedures are in place and are able to be carried out for a parish in order to resume public worship in the limited capacity outlined in Phase 2 and 3.

As we begin the gradual “opening” of our churches for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the following guidelines, protocols, and suggestion are provided to you to help assist you with this important task. As you will see, there will be numerous changes which must be adhered to in order to provide the safest environment we can for our people. We have tried to look at as many safety precautions as possible to ensure, as much as possible, the continued health and safety of everyone in our communities. There are still many people who are afraid and nervous regarding public gatherings, but deeply desire to return to Mass. Your attention and cooperation in this preparation process will be fruitful for your parish and hopefully allow for a slow and deliberate start up in order to avoid a severe “second wave” of the coronavirus.

The following is based upon current guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and other public health authorities. These guidelines also integrate the requirements of the Catholic Church teaching, liturgical law, and Canon law. These have been formulated with great care to preserve the respect and reverence due to the Holy Eucharist and the powerful liturgical sacramental symbolism of the rites of the Mass.

It is our hope that this document reflects the most current guidance from health authorities. As we pass through different phases of the pandemic, we will update the directives as the official guidance changes, as we expect it will.

### **Guidelines and Protocols for the Celebration of any Liturgical or Sacramental Rites Implementation of Phase 2 and 3**

In Phase 2, the celebration of public daily Masses may resume, with protocols to ensure limited and restricted attendance in keeping with distancing and safety protocols as presented by and following civil and health authorities.

In Phase 3, the celebration of public Sunday Masses may resume, with limited and restricted attendance increasing over time, as presented by and following civil and health authorities.

In Phase 4, the celebration of Sunday Masses at full capacity may resume, with a return to a state resembling Catholic life before the beginning of the pandemic.

#### **A. Sunday Obligation**

- **The dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass is granted to all the faithful through Sunday, August 30, 2020.**
- Anyone who is older than 65 years of age (the recommended CDC age), with a compromised health condition and/or caring for the sick in any way, are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and should stay home.
- Although the faithful are dispensed for their Sunday obligation to attend Mass, they are strongly encouraged to participate in a live-streamed or televised Mass and make a spiritual communion. It is important to keep holy the Lord's Day in some intentional way – spending time in prayer, reading the Sacred Scriptures, meditating on the Lord's suffering, death and resurrection, or participating a spiritual or corporal work of mercy.

#### **B. Frequency of Masses**

- In accord with canon 905§2, because pastoral necessity may require it, all priests in the Diocese of Saginaw are permitted to celebrate the Eucharist *twice on weekdays and three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation*. The Saturday vigil Mass does not count towards the limit of Masses celebrated on Sunday. Should any additional Masses be necessary, (such as a fourth Mass on Sunday) priests will need to seek permission of the Bishop.

#### **C. Preparing a Church Building for Public Mass**

- Please have hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church.
- Secure a supply of disinfectant to be used to clean the church after each service.
- All hymnals and missalettes (and other items) should be removed from the pews and stored for the duration of the pandemic. At each Mass, disposable worship aids should be distributed, then discarded after each liturgy. As an alternative, the use of digital projection and screens is encouraged. As always, appropriate copyright licenses are to be respected.
- Tape off or rope off rows of seating in the church, in order to allow people to sit at least 6 feet from each other. This will help you calculate the number of people allowed in the church building at one time.
- Create a parish team who will be trained to implement these strict protocols, and provide guidance for the faithful throughout the time they are at the church.
- Develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and putting tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, maintaining a 6 foot distance from each other.
- The use of signage will be helpful in preparing the church building and providing direction for the faithful.

#### **D. Public Masses with Strict Limits On Public Gatherings and Strict Physical Distancing**

- Priority for attending these earliest Masses should be given to the Elect, Candidates for Full Communion, and those assisting these two groups for entrance into the Catholic Church. Directives for completion of RCIA and sacramental initiation of these groups will be forthcoming from the Office of Liturgy.

- Confirmations and Celebration of First Eucharist scheduled for the remainder of 2020 can begin to be celebrated if the candidates have adequately completed their preparation. Delegation for priests to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation will be forth coming. Plans and instructions for their celebration will soon be provided to parishes by the Office of Worship.
- The celebration of these sacraments could be spread out over the course of the summer and take place during a weekday Mass adhering to these social distancing guidelines and protocols.

**General Provisions:**

- Live streaming Masses should continue during this phase.
- Dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass will remain in effect through August 30, 2020.
- Anyone who is older than 65 years of age (the recommended CDC age), with a compromised health condition or caring for the sick in any way, are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and should stay home.
- Anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick in any way, should not come to the church.
- Please have hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church. Encourage those entering and exiting to perform hand hygiene.
- Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of the church must take place before the first Mass and then after every Mass or use by the public. CDC guidelines will be helpful in disinfecting the space.
- In accord with current public health recommendations, the people (except liturgical ministers in the sanctuary) must wear cloth face coverings (masks) upon entering the church until they depart. Masks will remain on their face throughout the whole Mass except for when receiving communion.

**E. Limiting the Size of the Congregation & Physical Distancing**

- Masses should be limited in attendance, depending on the size of the church building.
- There must be strict social distancing. For a public Mass, to maintain strict physical distancing;
  - The faithful should maintain a 6 foot distance from each other at all times.  
Recommendation: Use tape of some kind or rope to close off rows of seating in the church, in order to guide the people to stay at least 6 feet from each other. This will allow you to use every other pew. This will provide 20-25% capacity.
  - Members of a single household may sit together in the same row. (For example, if a family arrived in a single private vehicle, they could sit together.)
  - In areas where the faithful might stand in line (for example, waiting to go to confession or to receive Holy Communion), place tape on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.
  - Ushers at the entrances of the church will help “direct traffic,” to ensure that the faithful keep 6 feet from each other while entering and exiting the building. (Members of a

- single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other.)
- If all the available spaces are filled, additional people must not be allowed to enter the church building. Ushers must be strict with this protocol.
  - Encourage the faithful to maintain physical distancing everywhere on the church property (on the church steps, in the parking lot, etc.).
  - Choirs are not allowed. Vigorous singing, especially in close proximity to others, may increase the risk of viral spread.

**Other Considerations:**

- Masses could be scheduled with greater frequency. Attendance could be first-come first-served, or allocated by some other system (a rotation system based on the first letter of last names, an online ticketing system like Eventbrite, etc.)
- As the weather gets warmer, outdoor Masses in the parking lot are possible, where the Mass is celebrated in a location visible to the faithful who remain in their cars. The use of outdoor speakers would be helpful. Such events do not constitute public gatherings of more than 10 persons, if the attendees remain in their cars.

**F. Specific Provisions for the Parts of the Mass**

- A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public Masses or administering sacraments during this phase. The same holds for other ministers who might serve at Mass (Deacon, servers, lectors as well as for sacristans, ushers, etc.)
- The priest celebrant or other ministers should NOT wear a mask or gloves during the celebration of Mass. Instead, they should remain more than 6 feet from the congregation during the entirety of the Mass. In such circumstances, there is no substantial risk of infection.
  - A further consideration: the Mass is imbued with powerful sacramental and liturgical symbolism. Wearing a mask and gloves would be a detrimental counter-sign in this context, and it is not warranted by considerations of hygiene if the priest remains a proper distance from the congregation.
- To the extent possible, the other ministers (deacon, servers, lectors) should maintain a 6 foot distance from the priest and from each other, except as provided below.
  - The priest could place the missal on a stand at the chair or even on the altar when he recites the presidential prayers, rather than having the server hold the book.
  - Maintain a proper distance in the sacristy and during the entrance and recessional processions.
  - These processions should be minimal. If necessary, given the configuration of the church, consider modifying the processions route in order to maintain a 6 foot distance from members of the congregation.
  - The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) should be omitted.
  - A deacon (if present) or a server may bring the missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair.

- (Alternatively, the priest could do this himself.) After the deacon or server moves away, the priest could come to the altar and arrange the items on the altar.
- The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance, either at a credence table near the altar or at the side of the altar itself. After the priest returns to the center of the altar, the server could then remove the lavabo items.
  - Special provision should be made for the collection. Baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can maintain a suitable distance from others. As an alternative, you can set up baskets at collection points where the faithful can place their contributions.
  - If hosts for the Communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer.
  - For the elevation of the sacred species at *“Through him, and with him, and in him,”* if the deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is brief, he need not remain 6 feet from the priest while doing so.
  - The invitation to the faithful to exchange a sign of peace is omitted.

#### **G. The Distribution of Holy Communion**

Mass will be brought to a conclusion followed by the distribution of Holy Communion, with these precautions to reduce risk. It will also permit the priest to remove his chasuble for distribution of Holy Communion, given that it is difficult to launder if anyone should sneeze or cough on him.

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the conclusion of the Mass. He should also add that the faithful should maintain a 6 foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The Precious Blood will not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a con-celebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)
- A sufficient quantity of hosts for distribution to the faithful should be consecrated at the Mass.
  - You might consider purchasing 1½ inch hosts for consecration for a safer & more hygienic distribution of Holy Communion with less chance of touching a communicant’s hand or tongue.
  - Special provisions for those in need of low-gluten hosts should receive particular consideration from pastors.
- The priest (and, if present, the deacon) would consume the Eucharist in the normal way, but would not immediately proceed to distribute Communion to the servers or the faithful. Rather, the newly consecrated hosts would be briefly placed in the tabernacle awaiting the conclusion of the Mass.

- After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest (and deacon, if present) remain in the sanctuary. At the chair, the priest removes his chasuble and the deacon removes his dalmatic.
- A small table is to be placed at each Communion station, with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The number of Communion stations should be minimal.
- The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion) should use hand sanitizer immediately before approaching the tabernacle. He should also don a surgical mask or cloth face covering.
  - If a priest who celebrated the Mass is in a higher risk group, a different priest, a deacon if present, or another Eucharistic minister, might distribute Holy Communion in his place.
- Now vested in alb and stole, the priest retrieves the newly-consecrated hosts from the tabernacle and returns to the altar.
- Holding up a single host, he says: *“Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.”* He then leads the people in saying: *“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”*
- The priest (and other ministers if present) proceeds to the place prepared for distribution of Communion. Each stands next to a table with corporal and hand sanitizer in order to distribute Communion.
- The faithful should remove any face coverings and gloves before coming forward for Holy Communion and remain 6 feet apart in the Communion line,
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
  - Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed if the priest performs hand hygiene.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place his ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer. (He may also arrange for an ablution cup to be on the table, and may purify his fingers in the ablution cup before using hand sanitizer.) He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.
- **Communion on the Tongue vs. in the Hand:**  
Because of the seriousness of this virus, all of the faithful should receive Communion in the hand. Opinions on the risks of receiving Communion on the tongue versus in the hand vary within the medical and scientific community. If communicants insist on receiving Communion on the tongue, they should remain in their pews and receive Communion last, after all others have received, or a separate Communion station could be provided for them.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other minister) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).

- After receiving Communion, the faithful may immediately depart on their own in silence or after making a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

#### **H. Distribution of Holy Communion during Masses in the Parking Lot**

- In cases where the faithful are in their cars, the communicants should get out of their cars to receive, one car at a time. This would be done similarly to what is recommended for the reception of Holy Communion after Mass, outlined above.
- This is preferable from a public health perspective, because it permits the priest (wearing a mask but not gloves) to stand next to a hand sanitizing station (a table with corporal and hand sanitizer), as described above, and thus gives him the ability to sanitize his hands after each Holy Communion, if necessary. If the priest walks from car to car or from window to window, this hand hygiene would be difficult.
- It is also preferable, from a sacramental perspective, because it removes the temptation to pass the Eucharist from person-to-person in the car, if a person is not near an open window, and eliminates the problem of self-communication.
- In addition, distribution of the Eucharist in another vessel or container (a plastic bag, paper cup, or metal pyx) is not warranted from a public health perspective and may even increase risk: CDC guidance suggests that the virus is not easily transmitted by food, whereas passing other containers from person-to-person involves more contact with surfaces. From a sacramental perspective, there are additional reasons to discourage this practice, dealing with reverence for the sacrament, the problem of self-communication, the danger of profanation, and the problem of purifying the disposing of containers.
- In principle, there should be no public health objection to having people exit their cars, one car at a time (perhaps guided by an usher to direct traffic). This would not constitute a large gathering.

#### **I. Pastoral Care of the Sick and Homebound**

- This ministry should be limited to those who are dying, those about to undergo serious surgery, and those with COVID-19 who request the Sacraments. The Anointing of the Sick should be administered by the priest according to the guidelines previously issued. Viaticum may also be given to those who are dying.
- Holy Communion shall not be distributed to any other parishioner who is homebound or who cannot attend a parish Mass. Therefore, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (or any family members) cannot (at this time) receive the Blessed Sacrament in a pyx in order to visit those who are not attending Mass.
- Priests, deacons and pastoral administrators are asked to find other ways of comforting and praying with the homebound, such as praying together by phone. “Acts of Spiritual Communion” should be made widely available through parish websites and other such means so that the sick and homebound are able to be participate at their place of residence.
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and other Lay volunteers should not be visiting the sick in any official capacity. However, they are encouraged to reach out to those whom they would “normally” visit. And, like our priests, deacons and pastoral administrators, they are also encouraged to find ways to reach out to those unable to attend a parish Mass.