



Diocese of Wilmington

RESTORING PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF MASS and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

May 20, 2020

Revised October 22, 2020

OVERVIEW

While the following guidance represents a directive from Bishop Malooly, all pastors, parochial vicars, and other personnel are to follow all official governmental and public health guidelines enacted for the prevention of the contraction and spread of the COVID-19 virus, including limitations on gatherings, physical distancing, hygiene and sanitation measures and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The size, location, and make up of our parishes vary widely and these recommendations take into account that a one-size-fits-all approach is not possible and not every situation or issue can be anticipated. Pastors may choose to implement additional and more restrictive rules for public worship than those permitted as they take into consideration vulnerable members in their respective parishes and other issues specific to their communities.

These guidelines cover only the beginning phases of a long process which we hope will lead to the full resumption of the liturgical life of our Church. We should not expect to open our doors and return to our normal routine as it was prior to this pandemic. Short and simple Masses should be the starting point, with a slow buildup, very much in the spirit of progressive solemnity.

Pastors should consider forming a task force to help create and implement these guidelines for their local circumstances.

GENERAL DIRECTIVES

1. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass issued on March 12, 2020 remains in place for the Diocese of Wilmington. Parishes should continue to make Masses available to the faithful through such means as internet livestream or recording, ensuring that the faithful may maintain a spiritual connection with their local church.
2. **Please note that the following has not changed:** Home visits to the sick by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion continue to be prohibited until further notice.
3. **Anointing of the Sick remains permissible on an individual basis. Communal celebrations are still not permitted at this time.**
4. Good communication with parishioners is essential, starting before public celebrations resume. The method of determining attendance (e.g. sign-ups, lottery, etc.), the health and hygiene practices, the procedure for receiving Communion, etc. should be clearly communicated in advance of the first public Mass.

5. Those who are symptomatic or who have been exposed to the virus within 14 days are not permitted to enter the church, in accordance with national, state and local health directives. All attendees are asked to check their temperature at home before coming to church for any reason. Likewise, anyone with a persistent cough or who otherwise does not feel well should not come to church.
6. Parishioners who are particularly vulnerable (e.g. over the age of sixty, existing heart or lung conditions, diabetes, or otherwise immuno-compromised) are **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED**, for their own health, to avoid the risk of attending public celebrations of the Church until all restrictions have been lifted.
7. Individuals are the primary protectors of their own health; during this current situation, there is always risk coming into public spaces. To that end, coming into an open church building carries that same risk. Individuals assume that risk for themselves in these circumstances.
8. All liturgical celebrations should observe limitations on gathering sizes and ensure social distancing.
 - a. Attendance at any liturgy or event in the church is limited to **60% (in Delaware) or 75% (in Maryland)** of normal capacity. This number is to be determined by taking your fire marshal approved maximum occupancy number and **multiplying it by either 0.6 or 0.75, respectively.**
 - b. Pastors may determine a lower capacity if they feel it necessary for their particular community.
 - c. Members of the same household may sit together, but there should be at least 6 feet of separation otherwise. Gatherings before and after celebrations **continue to be prohibited, though ministers are now able to greet the faithful before or after Mass, preserving social distancing and wearing a mask, mindful not to create a crowd.**
9. All members of the assembly and all ministers, except the priest-celebrant, are to wear face coverings at all times while in church. The priest-celebrant is *permitted* to wear a covering during Mass but not *required* except during the distribution of Communion.
 1. Signage should be posted reminding parishioners that the CDC advises that a facial covering does not protect one from the virus but can “help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others.” Note: the CDC advises that children under age 2, or people whose breathing may be impeded by wearing a facial covering are exempt from wearing a facial covering. Visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>

10. All members of the assembly and all ministers are to sanitize their hands upon entering the church. Hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, or hand-washing facility (with soap) is to be made available as practical, recognizing that there is a shortage of hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. The faithful may also be asked to bring their own.
11. Pews and other surfaces in the church are to be thoroughly disinfected initially and then disinfected again after each time the church is used. Indoor air ventilation and circulation is to be maximized to the extent possible.
12. All hymnals and missalettes are to be removed from the pews and stored for the duration of the pandemic. No other materials may be left in the pews. Printed or e-worship aids are strongly recommended. Printed aids must be disposed of after each liturgy. Some pastors have also suggested allowing parishioners to take missalettes home and bring with them for personal use.
13. Holy water fonts are to remain empty until further notice.
14. Signage reminding parishioners of physical distance should be posted. Some manner of demarcating or designating safe distancing should be put in place, while recognizing that families need not maintain such distancing. There is no perfect solution here, just do the best that you can to ensure proper physical separation.
15. Entrance and exit doors and bathrooms are to be adequately designated, monitored and sanitized.
16. Suggestions for restrooms:
 - a. Only one person at a time may occupy the restroom.
 - b. At the entrance to the restrooms, the floor should be marked in 6-foot intervals, beginning 6 feet from the door.
 - c. Place antibacterial/viral wipes in each stall, if available. Alternatively, make sure a hand washing facility (with soap) is available.
 - d. Post a sign on the door and in each restroom indicating the following:
 - i. Only one occupant in the restroom at a time.
 - ii. When waiting, stand at least six feet apart (as indicated by floor markings).
 - iii. Post signage reminding parishioners to wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before leaving the restroom area.
17. Keeping your bathrooms closed during this time is also an option.

18. For more sanitation guidelines visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html>

CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

1. Pastors may wish to consider using some type of reservation system to allow people to sign up to attend Masses. This is one option that could help. Whatever means are utilized should be clearly communicated to parishioners.
2. Consideration may be given to the use of other available venues (e.g. parish hall) for Masses, especially if this would allow for the sanitizing of other venues also in use. If appropriate, outdoor Masses are permissible. Please consult the Office of Worship should you wish to schedule an outside service.
3. Liturgical Ministers should be thoroughly briefed on the contents of this document and the strict necessity to maintain social distancing and safety for all participants in the Mass.
 - a. Priests who are particularly vulnerable (e.g. over the age of sixty, existing heart or lung conditions, diabetes, or otherwise immuno-compromised) may refrain from distributing communion even when they are the celebrant.
 - b. Lay ministers in the sanctuary (readers, altar servers, sacristans, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion) **may be used in limited numbers, e.g. reducing the number of lectors, an altar server to process in with the cross and set the altar but not assist at the levabo.** Particularly using only ministers under 60 years of age.
 - c. Permanent deacons should be mindful of their particular circumstances such as age, pre-existing conditions, secular employment, or family health situations that may limit their participation in parish liturgical ministry.
 - d. Ushers should be limited to the number actually needed, given the size and layout of the church. Ushers must wear face coverings and follow all social distancing precautions.
 - e. The use of choirs is to be omitted until further notice. The preferred musical accompaniment at Mass consists of one cantor and one organist or pianist. Consideration may also be given to omitting congregational singing altogether in order to minimize particle spread.
4. Liturgical celebrations should balance reverence with brevity.
5. The presentation of the gifts by members of the assembly is to be omitted.

6. A collection may be taken up, but baskets are not to be passed and social distancing is to be maintained.
 1. Baskets with long handles may be used by ushers if proper social distancing (six feet) can be maintained.
 2. Baskets or other appropriate receptacles may also be placed so that parishioners could drop their offertory in the basket or receptacle as they exit the church.
7. Pastors should consider having the congregation dismissed by rows, under the supervision of ushers, to avoid crowding at the exits of the church.
8. **While** the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful may **continue to** be moved to the very end of Mass, after the final blessing, **every consideration should be made to distribute Holy Communion within Mass, as normal. Doing so may require ushers to ensure an orderly exit.**

Directives for the Distribution of Holy Communion

1. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the laity continues to be suspended until further notice.
2. Each Priest and Deacon is to consume the Precious Blood from separate chalices. (Note that while the Deacon here has his own chalice, he must be given his chalice by the Priest-celebrant; he is not permitted to communicate himself.) Each is to purify the chalice he uses.
3. Immediately after consuming the Sacrament, the Priest-celebrant and Deacon are to disinfect their hands, even if they do not distribute Communion.
4. All Priests, Deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must wear face masks for the distribution of Communion.
5. The practice of self-communication (i.e. a communicant taking a host from the ciborium instead of receiving from a minister) remains prohibited.
6. A small table is to be placed next to each station for distribution. On each table is to be placed a corporal, a purificator, and a hand sanitizer.
7. If the minister of Communion touches the hand of a communicant, or if a communicant receives on the tongue, the minister is to place the ciborium on the corporal and sanitize his hands before distributing to the next communicant.
8. Communicants have a right to receive on tongue if they so choose. However, we are to strongly encourage them not to. If they must, then they should wait

and come forward at the end of the line. If appropriate, pastors may choose to have a separate line for those who wish to receive on the tongue.

1. The minister of Communion must sanitize his hands in the manner described above after every communicant that receives on the tongue.

Instructions for those receiving Holy Communion

1. All Catholics present who are in a state of grace are invited to receive Communion at this time.
2. Those who have health concerns and do not wish to receive sacramental Communion may make an Act of Spiritual Communion
3. Those who will not receive communion should not come forward with hands crossed for a blessing; there is a blessing for everyone at the end of Mass.
4. Children who will not receive communion but who are old enough to remain quietly in their pew should do so, and not get in the line for Communion.
5. When you approach for Communion, please remain six feet from others in the line and from the minister. When it is your time to receive, keep your mask on and remain six feet away from the minister while he shows the Host and says, The Body of Christ. After you respond, Amen, approach the minister.
6. Receive the Host in your hand, then step six feet to the side, away from the minister. Then loosen your facial covering, consume the Host, and replace the facial covering.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be made available to the faithful.
- As always, the priest should take great care to ensure that the conversation with the penitent remains absolutely confidential.
- A priest can establish an area for confessions in an open area of the church or church hall, or a Reconciliation room with adequate space for distancing.
- Those waiting to have their confession heard should maintain 6 feet of separation and be wearing masks. Markings on the floor or seating should be arranged accordingly to maintain 6 feet of social distancing.
- A church rectory cannot be used for confessions.
- A priest confessor and the penitent should both wear a mask since by nature confession occurs in a close setting.
- Confessions outside of the church may be offered, for example in a private but visible area on the church grounds.
- Proper sanitization of any areas or surfaces touched by penitent is necessary after each confession.
- The Sacrament of Penance cannot be celebrated by cell phone, FaceTime, Zoom or any other video conferencing technology.
- Cell phones and any other electronic devices (with the exception of a hearing aid) should also not be used to amplify the voice of either the confessor or penitent.
- Even though the Sacrament of Penance is available, the faithful are encouraged to follow the directives of the Holy See regarding perfect contrition.