



Restrictions and options for worship amid the COVID-19 pandemic

General Principles

The centrality of the Eucharist for Catholics. The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” and so we must make every effort to make it as available as possible within the constraints forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. The last 40 days in this Eucharistic desert has been a very difficult time of deprivation for us that has served to intensify our longing for and appreciation of this great gift that we so often take for granted. Though the following restrictions are somewhat burdensome, we thank God for the opportunity to gather once again, even on a limited basis, to receive the sacred body and blood of Jesus, our Savior.

Principle of Subsidiarity: Decisions should be made at the lowest level; those most directly on the scene are in the best position to assess the most effective way to proceed. The application of basic principles provided by the diocese is the responsibility of the local pastor, but he should exercise this responsibility in consultation with the priests in neighboring parishes in order to avoid a contrast between how the individual parishes are acting within a region. The following considerations are offered to help pastors make the best decisions for their parish in the concrete circumstances in which they find themselves.

Principle of the Common Good: Outside considerations must be taken into account, including directives of the legitimate civil and ecclesiastical authorities and the theology of the Church. While the following is written with weekend Masses in mind, the same principles apply to all parish liturgies and activities, including council meetings, Confirmations, Quinceañeras, parish-wide gatherings, the parish school and religious education classes, etc.

Need to be realistic, especially in terms of the unpredictability of how many people will come to a given service and the difficulty in enforcing the limitations and procedures imposed for the common good.

People have a right to receive the Eucharist if they are properly disposed, but this right is not absolute. As shepherd I have responsibility for the physical as well as spiritual welfare of those entrusted to my care, with special concern for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. I am now permitting the resumption of the public celebration of the Mass on a limited basis, but if the number of COVID-19 cases locally increases to dangerous levels, people should know that the temporary suspension of public Masses may have to be re-imposed.

The Sunday Mass obligation remains suspended indefinitely for all people, not only for those who cannot attend due to a parish’s crowd reduction measures and not just those who are most vulnerable, because even young people in excellent health who are exposed to the disease can transmit the disease to others who are vulnerable. So, each person is free to follow their own conscience, taking into account all of the vulnerable people and other circumstances of their life. Even so, all people remain obligated to “keep holy the Lord’s Day,” which they can do in any of a large variety of ways, including the following:

- Sunday participation in Mass live streamed or on TV—active participation, not just passive viewing.
- Attending weekday Mass in lieu of Sunday when Sunday Mass is unavailable.

- Private prayer in their homes for an hour—the amount of time they would have spent at Mass: meditating on the Scripture readings of the Sunday, praying the rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, novena prayers, etc.

Required restrictions (for the time being)

• **Liturgical restrictions:**

- Parishes must post signage reminding people to stay home if they do not feel well or have been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19.
- All of the previously promulgated measures remain in effect:
 - No Precious Blood for the congregation, concelebrating priests use intinction except the last priest to receive, who purifies the chalice.
 - No handshake or other sign of peace that involves physical contact. The sign of peace is optional, so the invitation of the faithful to exchange a sign of peace can be omitted if the priest so desires.
 - No Communion on the tongue. These are extraordinary times, and attention to the common good takes precedence over personal preference. The only exception is those who attend the traditional Latin Mass for whom reception on the hands is not an option. If someone insists on receiving the Eucharist on the tongue outside the traditional Latin Mass, they should be told politely that in the interest of public safety and out of consideration for those who will receive after them, they can wait until after Mass and receive Communion on the tongue then.
 - No water in the holy water in fonts, water blessed from one baptism cannot be retained or used for a subsequent celebration, it should be disposed of properly.
 - No holding hands at Lord's Prayer,
 - Attendance at weddings and funerals subject to the same restrictions as any other Mass.
- No priest, deacon or Communion Minister in a risk group will distribute Communion unless there is no alternative. We must use healthy Communion Ministers under age 65 instead. The risk groups that disqualify one from distributing Communion are: age (over 65) and chronic or immune suppressed conditions at any age, such as diabetes, cancer, cancer survivor, COPD, MS, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic bronchitis, asthma, obesity and heart disease.
- Distributing Communion will be our greatest challenge because it will be impossible for priests to maintain physical distancing, plus the challenge of maintaining physical distancing in the Communion line from each other and adjacent pews. Self-administration of the Eucharist is not permitted, nor is the use of a paper cup, etc. When it is their turn to receive, communicants should lower their mask briefly, extend their ungloved hands, one on top of the other, receive the host which is “dropped” carefully without touch into their waiting hand, place the host in their mouth and then raise their mask before returning to their place. Communion cannot be distributed with gloves, nor be received by a member of the faithful if they are wearing gloves -- the risk of mishaps with the Eucharist is too great. Ungloved sanitized hands will be used.
- If someone insists on receiving the Eucharist on the tongue outside the traditional Latin Mass, they should be told politely that in the interest of public safety and out of consideration for those who will receive after them, they can wait until after Mass and receive Communion on the tongue then.
- No choirs: For reasons of physical distancing, cantors can still be used but choirs will need to be suspended for the time being.
- Remove hymn books and all worship aids. Fewer things to disinfect. If you do have music, use only familiar songs that people know by heart or project them on the screen or wall. Online worship aids delivered to smartphones is another option, though not without problems. Paper worship aids are to be discouraged and if used, must be discarded after each Mass.

- Place unconsecrated hosts to be received by the people on a corporal to the side of the altar during consecration, not directly in front of the priest, reducing exposure to the exhalation of the priest.
- No offertory procession, bread and wine on credence table next to altar.
- No altar servers. The priest will need to do for himself everything that an altar server would normally have done, including handling the Missal himself, using a reading stand or praying the orations from the altar rather than the chair.
- Suspend all nonessential gatherings—no Children’s Liturgy of the Word, no RCIA dismissal, no coffee & doughnuts or any other post-Mass social gatherings.
- Collection baskets either at the entrance to Church or on long poles, not passed among the people person-to-person. If on long poles, the ushers wear gloves in addition to the masks that everyone is wearing.
- Paper bulletins are to be avoided—communicate with your parishioners electronically, posting the bulletin on the parish website and/or emailing it to parishioners. If paper bulletins are distributed, the ushers should wear gloves.
- Prop open entrance doors or have greeters hold them open to limit contact with door handles.
- Minimize contact—no greeting of people before and after Mass, enter and leave the sanctuary from an adjacent sacristy if that is available. Because some contact is inevitable, for instance with the sacristans, the priest should wear his mask right up to the beginning of Mass and resume wearing it right after the end of Mass, perhaps putting it on in full view of the people.
- No one comes forward for a blessing in lieu of Communion, all are blessed together at the end of Mass.
- Confirmation ceremonies remain suspended temporarily, including RCIA because touch—laying on of hands, administration of chrism, sponsor’s hand on shoulder—are part of the ceremony.

- **Safety requirements for all worshippers:**

- Masks. All persons age 10 and above who attend must wear face masks or other face covering except the lectors when reading and the priest, who maintains 12' separation from others according to Governor Hutchinson’s guidance, except to distribute Communion. Priests, deacons and Communion ministers put on masks for distribution of Communion. As previously stated, communicants lower their masks only briefly in order to transfer the Eucharist from their hand to their mouth and then replace the mask immediately.
- Hand sanitizer. All are administered hand sanitizer upon arrival at the Church and those distributing Communion use hand sanitizer before and after distributing Communion, but otherwise frequent and obvious use of hand sanitizer during Mass is to be discouraged. A parish may ask people to bring hand sanitizer from home if it is difficult for the parish to provide.
- Disinfectant wipes should be provided in the pews, possibly in the empty hymn book racks, and the worshippers be asked to wipe down their area upon arrival and again when ready to leave the Church, discarding the wipe on the way out.
- Only 6 feet of separation is needed in Masses with congregational singing (with a cantor but no choir) because all except the cantor will be wearing masks. Only the cantor must maintain the 12 foot separation when singing without a mask.

- The number of people admitted to Mass will conform to restrictions placed by the civil authorities. Ushers must redirect people elsewhere once that limit has been reached.
- Maintain 6' distancing in Communion line except members of the same family, taped markings on the floor could help maintain this separation.
- Maintain 6' distancing in the exit line as people leave Mass. It might be desirable to dismiss people by rows, pew by pew, starting in the back of the church and working forward, asking people to proceed directly to their cars in order to avoid crowding at the exits.
- Adoration chapels should meet the requirements of physical distancing and sanitation. All printed prayer materials should be removed, stored away or discarded. People can bring their own materials with them, but they must take them with them when they depart, or they will be thrown away.
- No cry rooms. Cry rooms should be taken out of service. Even with 6' distancing, they are small enclosed spaces with small children, likely without masks.

Options that some parishes might find useful (not required)

• **Crowd reduction options.**

- Add additional Masses. Maybe shorten Masses in order to make more room on the schedule: Maybe no music, offertory basket at entrance to Church, very short homily. Maybe a 30-minute Mass on the hour every hour in largest parishes, giving time for the parking lot to empty and refill, asking people to leave the property quickly so the next wave of worshippers can come in. Remember that priests have faculties to celebrate only 3 Masses on Sundays and 2 on weekdays. Special permission is required to celebrate more Masses than that for pastoral reasons.
- Secondary location for Mass: Either overflow on property served by CCTV or a second venue on the half hour (to allow those redirected from Mass at the Church time to make it there) if you have a second priest available—public school auditorium, outdoor sports field, social hall.
- Outdoor and Parking Lot Masses: permitted but subject to logistical, meteorological and physical separation challenges.
- Invite people to weekday Mass as an alternative to Sunday. Have Sunday Mass, readings, homily, etc. all week.
- Apportion (weekday-for-Sunday?) Masses according to first letter of surname, Monday ABCD, Tuesday EFGH, etc.
- Rope off every other pew in Masses without vocal music, 6' between every family group in same pew. In Masses with vocal music, rope off two pews and 12' between every family group in the same pew. 6' is acceptable if the music is only instrumental. Leave seat closest to aisle empty (avoid contact with Communion line).
- Livestreaming Masses continue to be encouraged even with the public celebration of the Mass because at least initially there will be many people who cannot be accommodated. Moreover, after the pandemic subsides this would still be an excellent way to reach the homebound and others impeded from participating any other way.

- Have the ushers direct people to seating that conforms to physical separation requirements.
 - Restrooms: find a way to avoid crowding in the restrooms and make sure that the restrooms are attended to after every Mass.
- **Liturgical considerations:**
 - Communion to the homebound and other vulnerable populations remains generally suspended except in the case of viaticum, or of family members who are trained, commissioned Communion Ministers bringing the Eucharist to members of their own family. Priests can exercise their personal judgment in particular cases.
 - No face-to-face confessions unless 6' distance can be maintained. A screen must separate the penitent and confessor and disinfectant wipes should be provided to the penitent, who should be asked to wipe down the screen before leaving. Closed confessional boxes are problematic because they are a small enclosed space—a larger room or outdoor venue would be preferable.
 - Drive-thru confessions permitted so long as privacy and physical distancing can be assured.

+Anthony B. Taylor
Diocese of Little Rock
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