

To: All Priests
From: Office of the Vicar General
Re: Re-opening public Liturgies
Date: May 21, 2020



Brothers:

On Monday, May 18, Governor Cuomo announced that Churches are considered part of Phase 4, the final stage of his reopening plan. Yesterday, he contradicted that message at a press conference by stating that Houses of Worship can begin to host services that include no more than 10 people, wearing masks. He also stated that drive-in services are permitted, as long as social distancing rules are enforced. Obviously, the information is changing daily. The Diocese was given no advanced notice of these changes, despite our efforts towards communications.

We understand that this does not offer adequate time to prepare, and parishes will not be ready or able to adapt immediately. Individual parishes can implement these directives when the Pastor prudently determines that it is possible and can communicate the update to their parishioners. This will require flexibility, local adaptation where permitted, and patience from everyone. **Please remind parishioners that the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect. The sick and vulnerable should also remain at home.**

Diocesan Directives – Effective May 21, 2020

1. **Holy Communion: Until further notice, Holy Communion will not be distributed at any liturgies, including Weddings and Funerals.** Priests and deacons only will receive. Lay ministers will not receive Communion. Protocols are being finalized to adapt to these latest developments. Once they are published, it will take time for parishes and parishioners to understand and prepare to implement the new procedures. Please continue to instruct parishioners on the merits of Spiritual Communion. The Act of Spiritual Communion may be recited communally before Mass or following the Post-Communion Prayer.
2. **Funerals, Weddings and Baptisms (with no more than 10 people in attendance, including the celebrant) may begin in Churches as of May 21, 2020.** Please instruct all participants that masks or cloth facial coverings are required for anyone over the age of 2 years. People with serious health conditions that prevent them from wearing masks are not required to do so.

Priest celebrants are not to wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass. However, during the celebration of Weddings, Baptisms and Anointing of the Sick, masks can be worn at the celebrant's discretion, especially during those portions of the ritual when social distancing is not possible.

Cotton can be used in place of the celebrant's thumb for anointing during Baptism and the Anointing of the Sick, but not during Confirmations. **Reminder:** Use of the revised translation for Baptisms became obligatory on April 12, 2020.

3. **Confessions** can be scheduled in Churches, provided that you arrange some type of screen between the priest and penitent. Six feet of distance should also be maintained between priest and penitent. This will require most Confessions to be held outside of the confessionals. In addition, clear signs should assist those waiting for Confession, keeping them far enough away so they cannot overhear a person's confession. Those waiting must wear masks / cloth facial

coverings and must also maintain six feet of distance from each other. Outdoor Confessions are permitted, following the same rules.

4. **“Drive-in” Masses:** These are permitted where possible, provided that social distances are maintained. It is recommended that a tent or portable covering be used over the altar.
 - A. Holy Communion will not be distributed until further notice. Only priests and deacons will receive. This is a teaching opportunity, to deepen the faithful’s appreciation for the gift of the Holy Eucharist. It is also a chance for them to become reacquainted with the Sacrament of Confession as a necessary part of a healthy spiritual life and its relationship with Holy Communion. Directives will be published soon that will allow for distribution of Communion.
 - B. Masks and gloves will not be worn by the priest while celebrating Mass.
 - C. The Sign of Peace and offertory processions will continue to be omitted.
 - D. Encourage people to mail in donations or to give online. However, ushers wearing masks may go from car to car (preferably with baskets attached to poles) to take up collections.
 - E. You will need to make arrangements for either outdoor amplifiers and microphones, or a means of transmitting the audio of the Mass by FM radio or by online devices. For more information on FM Transmitters, please contact Fr. Steven Pietrowski at spietrowski@drvc.org.
5. Other creative means of prayer outdoors, following social distance protocols of 6 foot separations are permitted (i.e. outdoor / drive-in Eucharistic Adoration).
6. Indoor Masses are permitted with 10 or fewer people wearing masks or cloth face coverings. However, restricting attendance could prove unmanageable. Home Masses and clandestine Masses with a “select” group of the faithful are not permitted. Please understand the potential for divisiveness and perceived elitism that these could foster.

Please begin to plan the following:

1. Note: As liturgical protocols are developed and implemented, they integrate safety, respect for the dignity of the Sacraments, and respect for the laws of the Church.
2. When reception of Holy Communion is permitted to resume, it will be done according to the protocols outlined in the Thomistic Institute’s “Guidelines for Re-starting Public Mass”, for both indoor and outdoor Masses. When Mass is celebrated outdoors, Communion will not be distributed car to car, or by using devices or packages. Communion stations will be in set locations, at least six feet apart. Ushers and Extraordinary Ministers will need to be trained. Resources will be provided to assist you with this training.
3. Arrangements are being made in order that hand sanitizer and masks are available to parishes. This will be especially important for those distributing Holy Communion. Future protocols will explain the procedures in detail.

We share the frustrations of our people. These are unprecedented decisions in response to incredible times. We will continue to press for greater flexibility from our public officials. A time for more aggressive action may be approaching, but at the moment, we are exercising cooperation. Please maintain a spirit of hope, encouragement, fraternal and ecclesial cooperation with these directives. Thank you for your leadership.

Oremus pro invicem!

- **Father Eric R. Fasano**
Vicar General