



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests, Pastoral Administrators and Deacons

From: Bishop Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester + *Salvatore R. Matano*

Date: May 21, 2020, *Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord*

Re: **Update on a return to Mass with the faithful present during the Coronavirus pandemic**

Parishes are obliged to take all reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly those contained in my Memorandum of May 14, 2020, in which I asked parishes to begin preparing for a limited return to public Mass.

At a press conference on May 20, 2020, the Governor referenced religious entities and announced that throughout the state congregant services can begin on May 21, 2020, however no more than 10 people may be present. While the Diocese is grateful to learn that the topic of religious practice was addressed in the New York Forward plan, we are still awaiting more information from the state which will help us determine how best we can resume Masses with the faithful present, albeit in such a very limited manner. In particular, we desire a set percentage of the total church's occupancy rather than a small and fixed number. I know you understand the challenge this current allocation presents to our parishes. Thus, the obligation of a Catholic to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended and we have uniformly encouraged those most at risk to stay home. To assist our brothers and sisters at home, parishes are encouraged to continue to provide live streaming Mass and events.

In the same press conference, the Governor also mentioned "parking-lot services," but without specificity of any sort. Some consideration has been given to the possibility of offering Holy Mass outside, which understandably presents many challenges, particularly meeting all of the following protocols, but not with the same ease. Again, we continue to await further clarification and necessary information before this can receive any further attention; at this point it is not feasible.

Nonetheless, in looking to the immediate future, our time is better spent helping parish communities to meet the necessary standards set forth in the diocesan protocols, particularly those attached to this Memorandum. It is understandable that many parishes will be unable to do that immediately because of the configuration of their churches, the shortage of staff and volunteers, or the scarcity of cleaning supplies. Additionally, every parish will need to arrange a plan for how they would limit admittance to 10 people, and how they will seat those who arrive. It will be at the discretion of the individual pastor/parochial administrator/pastoral administrator to determine when they are able to follow all the directives and offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with the faithful present.

It also is clear that parishes will have to be able to adjust to changing circumstances, recognizing that we do not know how the pandemic will affect us in the weeks and months ahead. Parishes that begin public Mass with 10 people present may later have to impose further restrictions in the event of an outbreak in the local community.

In order to know of the status of our parishes, I ask that you please notify my office when you believe you are ready to begin Mass with no more than 10 members of the present, indicating that your parish is able to meet all necessary diocesan policies and guidelines which are attached to this Memorandum. You can do so by letter, telephone at 585-328-3228 x1245, or email to fr.daniel.white@dor.org. If a parish cannot meet these requirements, the parish should not yet begin Mass with 10 members of the faithful present.



**Policies for the Celebration of Holy Mass
with Limited Numbers of the Faithful Present during the Coronavirus Pandemic
as of May 21, 2020
*The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Our Lord***

What follows is a series of policies that, together with the Diocese of Rochester's *Policies for the Administration of Sacraments*, assist parishes with the sacramental and liturgical ceremonies during the Coronavirus pandemic. It is anticipated that the reopening of our churches and the resumption of the public celebration of the sacraments will be a gradual process marked in phases and thus, these policies may change. For convenience, this document also includes the contents of the **May 14, 2020 Memorandum** about remote considerations for parishes, as well as disinfecting instructions and the physical preparation of churches. The Office of the Bishop will continue to update parishes, as needed.

I. Remote considerations in anticipation of the time we are permitted to have Mass with the faithful present:

- a. Ascertain how best to convey information to your parishioners.
- b. If attendance is limited to a specific number or a percentage of the total occupancy, how will this attendance be regulated? Through a website or app (such as Eventbrite) or by a telephone call? Will this reach all parishioners?
- c. In the event that capacity restrictions are small, parishioners who wish to be present at Mass should be encouraged to consider attending Mass on a day other than Sunday to help spread out the population and afford others the opportunity to also be present as permissible.

RECOMMENDATION: *It may be advantageous to begin with weekday Masses with the faithful present before a Sunday Mass when the interest likely would be higher.*

- d. If you have multiple churches, choose **one** site that has ample seating, that most facilitates social distancing, is easily accessible, and can easily be cleaned. However, as clarified by email on May 19, 2020, it also is apparent there may be some locations in the Diocese where it would be prudent and

advantageous to have two (2) sites. For this to be considered as a legitimate option:

- all of the necessary precautions would need to be achievable in both sites;
 - two priests would need to be assigned to the parish(es); and
 - the parish(es) usual Mass attendance would need to be so significant that, if the state sets its' occupancy limitations (still unknown) very low, more members of the faithful would be able to attend Mass if two Masses could be offered simultaneously in two different sites.
- e. Identify the seating capacity of the church.
 - f. Review the Mass schedule. Perhaps additional Lord's Day Masses may be needed to accommodate the faithful who can only come in small numbers at a time.
 - g. Order ample cleaning supplies now. Research what works effectively but will not harm the surfaces. The Centers for Disease Control provides instruction on reopening and cleaning of public spaces: [CDC Reopening and Cleaning Instructions](#)
 - h. Identify what signage will be necessary to instruct the faithful and how it will be displayed.
 - i. Parishes must provide some form of sanitizer at the entrance(s) of the church.
 - j. Identify persons who will help coordinate entry and exit in the church. Strict physical distancing must be observed at all times, defined as "avoiding close contact with those outside one's household."

II. Disinfecting cleaning must be done before Mass and between Masses:

- a. Develop a process for who will clean between Masses and how they will maintain social distancing.
- b. Determine the minimum number of people needed to clean pews and surfaces.
- c. Estimate how long it will take to properly clean between Masses and schedule Mass times accordingly. Consider spacing Masses further apart, if necessary. This may include refreshing the air within the building through ventilation/circulation, as possible. [CDC Disinfecting Facilities Instructions](#)

III. Physically preparing the church for public celebration of Mass with limited access and reduced numbers:

- a. Check to see which doors could be propped open before Mass so that people do not need to touch doors as they enter.
- b. Cry rooms and nurseries will be closed.
- c. Remove all unnecessary chairs, tables, furniture to limit cleaning.
- d. Close off as much space as possible to limit cleaning.
- e. All missalettes, hymnals, prayer cards, and other paper resources must be removed from pews.
- f. A minimum of using every other pew should be followed. (Every third pew may be necessary.) Intervening pews must be cordoned off to assure six feet in all directions between household groups or individuals.
- g. Holy Water fonts are to be emptied and remain empty.
- h. Baptismal fonts and pools must be emptied and remain empty. Water is to be changed and blessed at each Baptism, according to the ritual.
 - o As always, blessed water is to be properly disposed of in a sacrarium, or directly into the ground.
- i. Those attending Mass must bring and wear their own face masks.

RECOMMENDATION: *Parishes, particularly those with parishioners who can make masks, should have a supply of extra masks in the event a parishioner arrives without his/her own.*

- j. Worship aids may only be distributed in print form if they are single-use for that Mass only and disposed of in receptacles after Mass. Parishes should be aware of copyright regulations. Live-streaming music requires a separate copyright license.
- k. If a parish uses a *Book of Intercessions*, it should be removed until further notice. Provisions should be made for intercessory intentions to be communicated to parish staff by other means.
- l. Special provision should be made for the collection; baskets should not be passed from person to person. Instead, set up central boxes or collection points where the faithful can place their monetary contributions at the entrance(s) of the church. Parishioners should be instructed and encouraged to give online. Other collections of food, supplies, etc. for charitable giving should be

arranged at a day and time outside of Mass and with suitable precautions in place.

IV. Enlisting of volunteers:

- a. Individuals considered part of the “vulnerable population” should not be asked to volunteer to fulfill ministries during this pandemic. All volunteers must freely wish to assist and should not be coerced in any way.

V. Liturgical ministries initially will be limited considerably:

RECOMMENDATION: *Since those listed below count towards **the total number of persons allowed** (10), serious consideration should be given to what is truly essential, thus affording more parishioners the opportunity to attend Mass.*

- a. The priest who is the principal celebrant.
- b. One (1) deacon (if necessary).
- c. Concelebrating priests (if necessary).
- d. One (1) reader (the principal celebrant [or deacon] may wish to read all readings and the Gospel).
- e. One (1) musician and one (1) cantor.
 - (Due to the research that shows singing expels significantly more aerosolized particles of virus than speaking, congregational singing is not feasible; choirs will not be possible during this transitory period).
- f. Ushers/hospitality ministers, as few as needed.
- g. There are to be no altar servers - youth or adult, until further notice.
- h. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should only be assigned where there is genuine need since initially attendance will be quite limited.
 - An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (if a deacon or concelebrant are not present) may only be utilized when the principal celebrant (or a concelebrant or deacon) is unable to distribute Communion himself due to pre-existing health conditions.

VI. General Principles for Mass:

- a. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass is suspended until further notice.
- b. Those who are at a higher risk for COVID-19 and those who are concerned for their health are urged *not* to come to church for Mass. Those who cannot attend Mass may be encouraged to spend time daily reading the Scriptures, praying with their families, watching a broadcast or livestreamed Mass, and making an *Act of Spiritual Communion*.
- c. Those who feel in any way sick should not enter the church.
- d. In accord with current policy of the State of New York, the faithful (over two [2] years old) must wear cloth face coverings when in public, including when they come to church.
- e. Attendees should sanitize their hands at the entrance of the church via sanitizer stations.
- f. All present at Mass should sit 6 feet or more away from others. Families of the same household may sit together.
- g. Ushers should assist in helping those present to observe this rule, and they should be given training to properly carry out this task.
- h. Parishes may wish to tape or mark pews, indicating seating placement for individuals. One side of the church may be used for families, while the other may be used for individuals whose seats are clearly marked.
- i. Members of the faithful must be seated at least 6 feet apart from each other in all directions.

RECOMMENDATION: *In areas where the faithful will likely stand in line (for example, entering the church, restrooms, when waiting to go to Confession or to receive Holy Communion, etc.), tape (colored painter's tape usually can be easily removed from most services) may be placed on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.*

- j. A decision about the feasibility of restrooms must be made. The number of people who enter a restroom at the same time should be limited to one (1). Restrooms must be sanitized after each liturgy and regularly.
- k. "Cry rooms" and other ancillary areas in the church are to be closed and locked.

- l. There are to be no social gatherings before or after Mass. This includes congregating in the church, vestibule, narthex, on the steps of the church or in the church parking lot.

VII. The Celebration of Holy Mass – Ritual Considerations:

- a. Priests, deacons and readers must wash/sanitize their hands before and after Mass. When preparing for Mass, sacristans must wear a mask and carefully wash their hands prior to touching the liturgical items. The priest celebrant and other ministers do not wear masks during the celebration of Mass (with the exception of during the distribution of Holy Communion when the priest wears a mask). Similarly, the priest celebrant and other ministers never wear gloves at any point during Mass.
- b. To the greatest extent possible, the priest, and, if applicable, the deacon, reader, and sacristan should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other.
- c. Before Mass, the *Roman Missal* is placed on a stand at the chair or even on the altar where he recites the presidential prayers. No one is to hold the *Missal* (or any book) for the priest.
- d. The simple Entrance Procession proceeds from the sacristy directly to the altar and should be conscious of social distancing. A *Book of the Gospels* is not used.
- e. The Sign of the Cross, Greeting and Penitential Rite can take place at the altar. A shorter option for the Penitential Act or sung setting of the Kyrie may be appropriate. When the Gloria is prescribed, it may be recited, or a shorter sung setting is used.
- f. All the readings may be proclaimed by the priest. However, if desired, one reader may be used. The cantor may lead the Responsorial Psalm, but not at the ambo.
- g. The *Universal Prayer* (Prayer of the Faithful) should include petitions for those infected by the Coronavirus and those who cannot be present at Mass. They are read by the deacon, or in his absence, the presider or the reader.
- h. The offertory procession is to be omitted.
- i. A credence table is set near the right side of the altar, containing everything necessary for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The presider disinfects his hands before preparing the altar and gifts. The lavabo should be performed with water by the priest alone.

- j. The ciboria for the congregation should be placed on a corporal away from the celebrant's paten and covered with lids or palls. Separate chalices for concelebrating priests and deacons should be covered with palls until the reception of Holy Communion. Social distancing is to be kept at the altar.
- k. The holding of hands during the Lord's Prayer, not part of the *Roman Rite*, is strictly forbidden.
- l. The invitation to exchange a sign of peace is omitted. After the priest offers Christ's peace to the people, "*The peace of the Lord be with you always*," and the people respond, "*And with your spirit*," the Mass continues immediately with the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God).

m. *The Distribution of Holy Communion*

1. All liturgical norms that govern the ordinary distribution of Holy Communion are to be observed, preserving the integrity of the celebration of Holy Mass and distribution of the Most Holy Eucharist. Reception of Holy Communion on the tongue remains permissible, as required by the liturgical law of the Church, with the admonition that the faithful should be strongly encouraged to receive Communion in the hand for the duration of the pandemic.

N.B. The *Thomistic Institute*, conveyed through the *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* states: "We looked very carefully at [the] issue [of receiving Holy Communion in the hand vs. Holy Communion on the tongue]. For those who desire to receive on the tongue out of reverence for Christ's presence in the Eucharist, we recommend that ... the [priest] purify his hands with hand sanitizer after each person who receives on the tongue."

2. There are only two approved ways of distributing Holy Communion during the pandemic in the Diocese. The *Thomistic Institute* has provided invaluable guidance in this regard after careful consideration with theological and infectious disease experts. The option described below will be most familiar to the faithful; the other option describes Mass followed by the distribution of Holy Communion, with special precautions, and is available on page 16 of the linked document, [Thomistic Institute Document on Distributing Holy Communion](#).
3. At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain how Holy Communion will be distributed, but that those who wish to remain in their places may do so, and they can be invited to make an *Act of Spiritual Communion*. (Congregants who are not coming forward to receive Holy Communion or a blessing should

be asked to still get out of their pews at the beginning, so that no one will have to climb over anyone else.)

RECOMMENDATION: *Prior to the distribution of Holy Communion, the following statement may be read:*

“As always, Catholics in the state of grace are welcome to receive the Sacrament although no one is obliged to receive Holy Communion. Those not receiving Holy Communion sacramentally are urged to make *Act of Spiritual Communion*, inviting the Lord into their hearts. When approaching for Communion, form a single line in the middle of the center aisle and remain six feet apart from others, observing the markings on the floor. After the priest says, ‘The Body of Christ’ and you say, ‘Amen,’ approach the priest, stopping an arm’s length from him.

“If you wish to receive Holy Communion in the hand, lower your mask, extend your arms and open your hand up fully, receive Holy Communion, step away from the priest, and then consume the Sacred Host. If you wish to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, please come up last. Then, lower your mask, extend your tongue fully and then move to the side to replace your mask. Then return to your pew by the side aisle.”

4. There will be only one station for distributing Holy Communion in the Sacred Host. The Precious Blood is not offered, nor are the faithful to receive by intinction. The priest stands at the foot of the sanctuary. An extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (if a deacon or concelebrant is not present) may only be utilized when the principal celebrant (or a concelebrant or deacon) is unable to distribute Communion himself due to pre-existing health conditions.
5. There should be a small table to the side of the priest. On this table is to be placed a corporal, a purificator(s), an ablution cup to purify one’s fingers before using the sanitizer (the water is later poured down the sacrarium) and a hand disinfecting product. When a priest sanitizes his hands, he first places the ciborium on the corporal and then disinfects.

RECOMMENDATION: *To assist safe social distancing, tape should mark where people stand or stop during the reception of Holy Communion. There should be tape markers beginning six feet from where the priest stands for the distribution of Holy Communion. Then going back there should be tape markers every six feet so that communicants can maintain appropriate distancing as they process to receive Communion. There should also be a tape*

marker about arm's length from where the priest stands – that will be the marker to stop and actually receive Holy Communion from the priest.

6. The priest wears a mask during the time of distribution of Holy Communion.
 7. 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. Similarly, “Communion tongs” or other instruments are not used.
 8. When receiving Holy Communion, communicants should minimize the time when their mask is lowered.
 9. In the case of contact, the priest will sanitize his own hands immediately. The priest also sanitizes his hands after each person who receives Holy Communion on the tongue.
 10. The priest does not place his hands on the heads of children or adults who are not receiving Holy Communion as a form of “blessing” during the distribution of Holy Communion.
 11. At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest should return the remaining hosts to the altar or tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer). The purification of vessels then continues in the prescribed manner.
- n. For the Concluding Rites, Mass continues as usual. The Recessional is from the altar directly to the sacristy. Ushers should arrange for an orderly dismissal of people, starting from the pews that are closest to the exit.
 - o. If bulletins are to be made available, it only occurs after Mass, on a table for the parishioners to pick up on their way out of church. It is preferable that bulletins be available online or mailed to parishioners.
 - p. Priests may greet the parishioners outdoors, but only in a manner that maintains social distancing and does not constitute congregating.
 - q. Parishes with livestreaming capabilities are encouraged to continue livestreaming practices, insofar as possible, in order to continue ministry to those who are sick and homebound, including those who are vulnerable and those whose concerns for personal safety keep them at home.

Additional sacramental policies to follow.