



Catholic Diocese of Columbus

Guidance for Pastors on Developing Procedures for the Return to Sacramental Life

Preliminary Steps

Forming a Return Committee: Pastors might consider the formation of a Return committee (including someone from the medical field) to help develop parish procedures.

Determine whether the Mass schedule should be altered: The faithful are dispensed from their obligation. Based on our experience before the “stay at home” order on the weekend when all of the faithful were last dispensed, we can expect Mass attendance to be 33% of what we would likely have at a normal Sunday Mass [October count estimate]. A conservative estimate, based on the potential of an increase due to piqued interest because of the hiatus in public Masses, suggests that Masses will only be 50% of what their normal attendance is [50% of the October count]. Factoring in that on a normal Sunday most Masses are under 50% of their seating capacity [actual capacity not October count], we can estimate that most Masses will be around 25% to 33% of their actual seating capacity in the first few weekends. Generally, proper social distancing will reduce seating capacity to 33% of the normal seating capacity. Therefore, with our conservative estimates, we can predict that most Masses will be able to accommodate the estimated crowds with safe distancing practices.

- Pastors, especially with regular Masses above 50% seating capacity, are encouraged to prepare a space (a hall, gathering space, or gymnasium) for potential overflow crowds and provide livestreaming of the Mass. If an overflow space is needed or available, it will also require sanitizing.
- Determine with your committee whether to use ticketing in advance ([Eventbrite](#)) to ensure that safe distancing is maintained.

Determine needed sanitization. In consultation with the maintenance staff and committee members, develop a list of all surfaces that will need disinfecting after Masses. Develop a plan to ensure the cleaning of vessels, liturgical items, liturgical vestments, server albs and cassock and surplices. High use areas within the sanctuary should also be wiped down with disinfectant after each Mass, including pews, chairs, and ambos. Light switches, door handles, push plates, and knobs should be sanitized after each Mass. Find volunteers and staff to coordinate the sanitizing. They will need to be instructed in proper procedures and not be “high risk.”

Publish the Guidelines: Explanation of the General Guidelines and parish procedures will need to be communicated to all parishioners using the parish website, social media, livestreaming events, mailings, signage throughout the physical plants, and announcements at Masses.

Determine Parish Protocols for the Celebration of the Mass to Consider

- Consider recruiting teams of “Ushers” to assist in safe distancing at Masses. These ushers are to wear gloves and masks. These “ushers” might direct people to their seats. In the case that pastors decide to have parishioners dismissed by rows for communion and/or to exit, these ushers could also guide the parishioners. Those in “high risk” are strongly advised not to serve in a liturgical ministry or as a volunteer for Masses.
- Provide instruction to all liturgical ministers on the parish’s procedure for safe distancing. The Office of Divine Worship has specific instructions drawn up for liturgical ministers.

- Priests, deacons, and liturgical ministers are not to wear masks or gloves during the Mass. However, masks may be worn at the distribution of communion; gloves are not to be worn. (GSPC, 9)
- Hand sanitizer should be available for ordinary and extraordinary ministers of communion before and after they handle the Eucharist and distribute communion.
- Consider minimizing the number of liturgical ministers to only those absolutely necessary so as to avoid potential contamination, including limiting the role of the deacon or limiting him to the proclamation of the Gospel rather than assisting at the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- Priests, deacons, and liturgical ministers are encouraged to maintain safe distancing and refrain from face touching.
- Consideration should be given to how to preserve social distancing while vesting before and after Masses.
- The processional and recessional may be shortened or modified. No offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) should occur.
- Pastors may consider avoiding the offertory collection or having those collecting donations use long handled baskets. Special boxes or baskets might be left at the exits for people to deposit their offertory.
- It is advisable that the Roman Missal be on a stand at the chair and/or at the altar rather than having a server hold it.
- Consideration should be made regarding the setting of the altar and avoiding contact with the chalices, paten, ciborium, and other items. The priest may dip his fingers in a bowl filled with water for the hand washing.
- Pastors might consider placing the paten or ciborium containing hosts for the faithful on a corporal to the side of the altar rather than in front of the priest.
- The distribution from the chalice is omitted. The instruction “Let us offer the sign of peace” and subsequent sign of peace is omitted.
- Choirs and congregational singing are discouraged. Music may be led by a cantor.
- Remove hymnals and other printed material from the church during this time to prevent the spread of the contagion. The use of worship aides may be considered. They should be used only once and disposed of properly after Mass. Consider copyright guidelines.
- Following Mass, it is suggested that socialization after Mass is to be avoided. Pastors may choose to include an instruction on this at the end of Mass.
- Social hours should be canceled.
- Regarding the distribution of communion: Pastors may decide between distributing communion within the Mass or immediately following the Mass. These two options are described in Guidelines for Sacraments and Pastoral Care by the Thomistic Institute. Suitable explanation should be provided prior to Mass on the new routine for communion. The faithful should be reminded to remove their face masks immediately before receiving communion so as not to fumble with the mask and communion.
- Regarding Distribution to the homebound: Great caution must be ensured that those ordinary and extraordinary ministers of communion visiting the homebound will not endanger those susceptible to COVID. Visits must be brief and ministers are to wear masks, practice hand hygiene with hand sanitizer, and maintain social distancing.
- The reception of Holy Communion in the hand is strongly encouraged. It is suggested that hand sanitizer be available next to those distributing communion in case they make contact on the hands with droplets from those receiving communion.

- Rescheduling sacraments: It is recommended that the Mass of Initiation of the Elect is to occur either at a regularly scheduled or special Mass during the weekends of May 30-31, June 6-7, or June 13-14. The delegation to confirm un-catechized adult Catholics desiring to complete their initiation is granted to all priests for the time period until September 13. It had previously been granted for only the weekend of Pentecost.
- It is left to the discretion of the pastor to schedule first communion, which could be scheduled on a weekday evening or Saturday morning to preserve safe distancing. If pastors judge that it is necessary to reschedule confirmation, contact the bishop's office. Infant baptisms, funerals, weddings, and processions of the Blessed Sacrament for Corpus Christi will need to follow proper hygiene and safe distancing procedures according to the pastor's implementation of these guidelines.

Prepare the Space for Public Worship

- Hand sanitizers are to be made available, especially at entrances and in the sanctuary.
- The church will need to be cleaned and disinfected prior to the first Mass. After each subsequent Mass, disinfecting of likely touched surfaces will need to be repeated.
- The Center for Disease Control provides [directions](#) on how to disinfect surfaces.
- Regarding cleaning agents, please consult with Central Purchasing.
 - Some recommendations: Avistat disinfectant spray. Oxivir has also been recommended. For wood surfaces, consider using Avistat or P&G Proline Spic and Span. There is no product on the market specifically for disinfecting wood surfaces. The products recommended will work but without a guarantee. If one is concerned, test the product first on an inconspicuous area and do not leave the wood wet with the product for extended periods of time.
- Every third pew should be designated for seating. Tape may be used to block off the other pews.
- Taped X's six feet apart along the main aisle (for communion) and where the confession line begins are suggested to ensure safe distancing in lines. Painter's tape is suggested.
- Regarding restrooms, consider initially closing access to restrooms. Because some parishioners may require access to restrooms, announcements about the restrooms might be included in the publication of safety standards leading up to the first weekend of public Masses. If restrooms will be made available, cleaning after each Mass and placing X's six feet apart to indicate the safe distancing line will be necessary. Signage may be posted encouraging only two or three people in a restroom at a time.
- Determine whether to block access to cry rooms, small gathering spaces, and the sacristy.
- Consider having the doors propped open for those entering the church.
- Ensure that all holy water fonts are to remain empty except for when needed for the Mass of Initiation or infant baptisms.

Important Resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>