



DIOCESE OF LANSING
M I C H I G A N

**A Plan to Gradually Restore Full Participation
in the Sacramental Life of the Church**

SUMMARY

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10). I am permitting the parishes of the Diocese to begin the public celebration of Mass as of Friday, May 29, 2020.

After consultation with the Presbyteral Council and their unanimous consent, guidelines are being presented to prepare for these celebrations. There may be pastors and parishes who do not feel prepared to begin these celebrations at this time; parishioners need to be patient. Catholics of the Diocese of Lansing remain dispensed from the obligation to participate at Sunday Mass until the end of July 2020, at which time the dispensation may be extended.

While the full text of the guidelines follow, this summary is meant to be a guide to those who wish to participate in Mass at those parishes which will be open. Love of neighbor must guide our behavior even more than a desire to be at Mass. Please, do not come to Church if you are elderly and/or have an underlying medical condition or if you are sick. We also discourage children under seven from attending since they may find it difficult to follow social distancing and other hygienic behavior. You must wear a mask at Church. Even if you feel this is unnecessary for yourself, consider the peace of mind and safety of your fellow Catholics. Church capacity will be limited to 25%, with certain pews roped off and social distancing expected. This

means that once the church is at capacity, you should be prepared to be turned away; accept such a decision graciously and continue to offer your sacrifices for the benefit of all our sisters and brothers. Since breathing on someone is a method of disease transfer, I strongly urge those who do attend to receive the Eucharist in the hand so as not to breath on the hand of the one distributing the Eucharist. Again, love of neighbor is the best way to show love of God. Please bring your own cleaning wipes to clean the pew area where you and your family will sit and kneel—the parish may not have time to do a thorough cleaning between Masses.

Recommendations for a Plan to Gradually Restore Full Participation in the Sacramental Life of the Church

Please use the following guidelines for your participation in the Mass from May 18th – May 28th. A final set of guidelines with minor emendations will be issued on or about May 26th, finalizing them for the planned May 29th opening of public Masses. Please note that from May 18th to May 28th, parishes may welcome a maximum of 5% of their parish’s seating capacity for daily Masses (Monday – Saturday). Note that the Vigil of Pentecost (May 30th) should be a time just for those who are being admitted to the Church and their sponsors and families.

Each individual parish will need to make these guidelines work for their own parish church, giving them concrete reality. Please look to your parish website for details.

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows” (SC 10). While we have for a time abstained from intimate participation in the liturgical life of the Church for the sake of the common good, we know that “in biological life, as in spiritual life, fasting presumes that eating is the normal thing to do.”¹ And so the following plan is set forth to place the Church in Lansing on a path toward the restoration of our common life in the liturgy, the ordinary means by “which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation” (CCC 1076).

Dispensation from the Sunday Obligation:

The dispensation from the Sunday obligation will continue through July 31, 2020. Parishes should plan to livestream Masses even after this date for those who cannot attend for serious health concerns.

Although the faithful are dispensed from their Sunday obligation to attend Mass, they must observe the Lord’s Day and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday, meditating

on the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection (an excellent way to do this is through participating in a broadcast of the Sunday Mass) or participating in a spiritual or corporal act of mercy.

Easter Obligation

Many have inquired regarding how this will impact the "Easter duty" of Catholics to "receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season" and the obligation to "confess your sins at least once a year" (CCC 2042). While the basic requirement of the Church is for all Catholics to "confess...grave sins at least once a year" (CIC 989), this should take place whenever necessary. And, while the "Easter duty" of receiving the Holy Eucharist should be done during the Easter season, the Code of Canon Law specifies that "for a just cause" this obligation can be fulfilled "at another time during the year" (CIC 920, §2). Protecting the health and well-being of the most vulnerable in a time of global pandemic is certainly such a just cause.

Timeline

It is expected that full participation in the sacraments will be achieved in a gradual approach. We will begin on Friday, May 29th. Guidelines for future phases will be issued when appropriate.

Pastoral Discretion

All prudence is to be observed in the parish's circumstances to safeguard the health of every participant, including the pastor's own health, and to observe all civil regulations so as to further the common good. Clergy who are among the vulnerable population should consider whether it is reasonable for them to celebrate Masses publicly during these times and how that should be done. These guidelines are not to be considered as mandates. Should a pastor determine that his parish should not open for public liturgies for any reason (including, of course, his own age or underlying health conditions), that is always his prerogative. His parishioners should be patient and understanding of such a decision. I will not counter that decision. In addition, should any parish employees, who normally would assist with liturgies, deem it imprudent for them to participate, they should be excused by their pastor.

The following are recommendations. It is up to pastors to decide how they are to be implemented in their parishes.

First Steps to Restore Full Participation in the Sacramental Life

These recommendations will take full effect on May 29th and continue until such time as public health and safety permit greater liberty. Please use them for the period from May 18th – May 28th for your participation in private Masses with small groups.

Public Masses in Church Buildings:

Building Preparations

- Any hand-to-object contact should be eliminated wherever possible.
- Doors should be propped open before Mass, if possible, so that people do not need to touch doors as they enter.
- Door knobs should be cleaned regularly, even several times a day.
- Pews, especially places where hands regularly touch, should be cleaned between Masses and daily.
- Hymnals and seasonal missalettes should be removed.
- The Altar should be set with everything prepared for Mass so that the priests hands are the only hands that need touch the Roman Missal and vessels related to the altar.
- Seating: at least every-other pew should be blocked off so as to create six-feet of distance between households.
- Post the 25% seating capacity of the parish for the benefit of parishioners.
- A small supply of face coverings, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes should be on hand.

Holy Water:

Holy water fonts should be left empty

- The normal reservoir of Holy Water remains available so that the faithful can fill small bottles for household use.

Collections:

Collection baskets should be arranged in such a way that contributions can be received without the passing of a collection basket, perhaps by placing one or two large collection baskets in a highly visible and easily accessible area in the nave, to allow for ease of placing the offertory into a basket where the ushers can observe them at all times and easily retrieve them at an appropriate time during the Mass, without causing undue attention and without creating social distancing concerns.

Parishes may want to leave a basket out for after Mass as well, since parishioners may miss it on the way in. That gives the priest the opportunity to remind people to share their gifts on the way out if they were not able to on the way in, and also use this time to remind people of the ability to give online which would benefit the parish greatly and make the collection count process much easier.

During or at the end of Mass, two ushers need to take the offertory to the drop safe while doing their best to maintain social distancing and handle the rest of the procedure with due precaution and appropriate safety protocols.

One suggestion may be to consider lining the baskets, if practical, with small plastic bags to allow for the ushers to avoid needing to directly touch the offertory before placing the contents in tamper-evident bags and then into the drop safe. Please ensure that your procedure is compliant with the standard internal control norms, as established by the Diocesan Finance Office.

Restroom Use:

Restroom use should be discouraged and social distancing maintained.

Participants

- Attendance should not exceed 25% of each parish’s seating capacity.
- Proper social distancing should be maintained between separate households.
- Those who are vulnerable to the coronavirus because of age or other health issues should be told not to attend public Masses. Please refer to this [list of vulnerable populations](#) from the CDC.
- Parents are encouraged to leave small children at home, if feasible.
 - Often, children who are not yet eligible to receive Communion lack the ability to follow hygienic and distancing guidelines that protect themselves and others.
- Nursing infants are welcome.
- All those in attendance must wear face masks. Even if you do not feel a need to do so, others will be made to feel much more comfortable if you do and we all want to have care for one another.

In General

Physical Contact Between Persons

- It may be best for clergy and lay greeters not to greet the faithful before or after the Mass so as to avoid crowding. If the clergy are greeting people prior to or following Mass, they should wear a mask and greet in a physically distant way.
- It may be helpful to have ushers direct the faithful as they enter and depart the church.
- The Sign of Peace: The invitation to the Sign of Peace and, consequently, the physical greeting are to be omitted until further notice.
- Entrance, offertory, and recessional processions should bypass the nave. Depending on the parish’s configuration, a short entrance and recessional from a sacristy near the sanctuary would accomplish this. There should be no offertory procession.
- If Hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer.
- It is suggested to dismiss the congregation by rows at the end of Mass to avoid crowding at the exits.
- During the elevation of the sacred species concluding the Eucharistic prayer, if there is a deacon present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. One should generally try to avoid being within six feet of others, but where necessary, a momentary interaction presents an acceptable risk, especially if other precautions are taken. Since this action is brief, the deacon does not need to keep a six-foot distance.

Singing & Responding

There is to be no congregational singing. In addition, spoken responses should not be vigorously vocalized, but expressed in a soft voice. Singing

and vigorous speech increases the risk of viral spread through the aerosolization of droplets, which are only filtered by N95-grade masks. Since singing is integral to the liturgy, it seems best to have a single cantor sing the proper Mass texts (with the assistance of amplification) in order to reduce the amount of singing. The faithful should be encouraged to participate by silently uniting their minds and hearts to the words being sung (cf. *Musicam Sacram*, 15) and making the responses in a soft voice.

Personnel

- A musician and/or a cantor.
- No need for servers.
- One deacon (not part of a vulnerable population)

Distribution of Holy Communion

- General Considerations: Pastors have the discretion to limit general reception of Holy Communion or to phase this practice in over time, particularly if they are in a region of greater viral spread. For those offering reception of Holy Communion, the following are recommended practices.
- To aid in maintaining social distancing, no communion procession.
 - There should be no distribution of the Precious Blood.
 - Vulnerable clergy should not distribute Holy Communion.
 - EMHCs in a vulnerable population should not assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.
 - Only the most experienced and well-trained EMHCs should assist with the distribution of Holy Communion.
 - Priests are generally the most experienced and adept at carefully distributing Holy Communion. If the pastor decides, priests alone may distribute Holy Communion, even if this prolongs the time necessary for the Communion Rite.

Reception of Holy Communion

- A small table should be placed at each communion station, with an unfolded corporal, an ablution bowl, and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- Just before distributing Holy Communion, the minister should purify his hands, don a face covering, and then wash his hands in a basin at a credence table.
- The faithful are encouraged to sanitize their hands with hand sanitizer as the minister of Holy Communion is washing his hands.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if someone is wearing a glove.
- The faithful desiring to receive Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand should wait to remove their face coverings until just before the reception of Holy Communion.
- An usher dismisses each household for Holy Communion (one household at a time). Do not rush this. Take it slow. If there is more than one household waiting to receive Holy Communion, ensure that a two-pew distance is maintained between households.

–The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way.
–Given the Church’s existing guidance on this point (see *Redemptionis Sacramentum* , no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk, with the precautions listed here.

–Discussion of “in the hand” and “on the tongue” reception:

Reception of the host on the tongue while standing: forces Eucharistic Minister to reach upwards, obscuring direct visualization of the point of contact and requiring release by feel to prevent dropping the Host. This is particularly true if the minister is shorter than the communicant. It can often result in contact between minister’s lower finger and recipient’s tongue or lower lip, creating very high risk of transmission to each Host subsequently handled, and directly through further finger-tongue contacts.

Reception on the tongue while kneeling: If performed by properly trained minister, can be done by releasing host into recipient’s mouth, avoiding direct contact. This method is conducive to an upward facing position on the part of the recipient, which orients the mouth in a more receptive position. Because the placement of the host can be directly visualized by the minister, it eliminates release by feel. Anecdotally, direct contact is very rare. This method does involve placement of the minister’s hands in close proximity to the mouth, which may cause airborne contamination of the minister’s hands and subsequent contamination of Hosts. This risk can be reduced somewhat by sanitizer use between communicants. To accommodate this option (cf. GIRM 160), a kneeler may be provided.

Reception in the hand: involves direct hand-to-food and hand-to-mouth contact. Since hands will have been exposed to surface and airborne contamination for 45 minutes or more, this represents high risk. This risk can be reduced somewhat by communicants who meticulously handwash immediately before Mass, and sanitize immediately prior to reception.

–If in the course of distributing Holy Communion the minister senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, first purify his fingers in the ablution bowl, then use hand sanitizer.

He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. Sanitizing between every household grouping would be best. It does not seem necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.

–At the conclusion of Holy Communion, the remaining hosts are returned to the tabernacle, the minister purifies his fingers, then may remove his mask, and finally washes or sanitizes his hands once more.

Personal Precautions

- Parishioners should bring their own face coverings and should wear them.
- The celebrant need not wear a mask but should when distributing Holy Communion. The lector need not wear a mask when proclaiming the readings.
- People who feel sick or have any symptoms of sickness (fever, cough, etc.) should not attend.
- People should bring their own sanitizing wipes to sanitize the area where they will sit and kneel. They should not rely solely upon the parish staff cleaning the entire church between Masses.

Private Prayer in Churches:

Churches should remain open for the faithful to pray. The faithful attending to pray should be encouraged to sanitize their space before and after prayer.

Baptism

Celebrations of Baptism should continue, according to the recommended percentage of the Church's seating capacity.

Confirmation

Bishop Boyea has given faculties to “any parish priest (pastor or vicar) to confirm anyone who is suitably prepared for the sacrament, until August 31, 2020.” Celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation should take place with the recommended percentage of the Church's seating capacity.

Holy Communion

- Services for the Distribution of Holy Communion should not take place except in situations where the pastor is not able to celebrate public Masses. These can happen only with his permission.
- Holy Communion should not generally be taken to the homebound, except for grave reasons and with the permission of the pastor.

Anointing of the Sick:

The Anointing of the Sick should still be administered by priests to those seriously ill or in danger of death, but always following the proper protocols to prevent transmission of COVID-19. Note that designated hospital chaplains may be the only clergy admitted to hospitals during this crisis. Please check with your local hospital to see what their policy is.

Holy Matrimony:

Celebrations of the Order for Celebrating Matrimony and convalidations should continue according to the recommended percentage of the church's seating capacity.

Funerals:

Celebration of Masses of Christian burial may continue according to the recommended percentage of the church's seating capacity.

Sacrament of Penance:

The Sacrament of Penance should still be offered as before, at regular times and by appointment.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament:

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament should take place according to the recommended percentage of the church's seating capacity. Of course, under no circumstances is the exposed Blessed Sacrament to be left unattended.

For up-to-date information about the Diocese of Lansing's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit www.dioceseoflansing.org/coronavirus. Please continue to share this website with your parish communities.