



## URGENT MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, and Religious Houses

From: Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas

Re: Gradual Restoration of Public Masses and Liturgies

Date: 8 May 2020

*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Mt. 28: 20).*

Having now entered into a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in which the State of Ohio is beginning to reopen certain businesses, and after prayerful consideration and consultation with the Bishops of Ohio, our diocesan College of Consultors, Presbyteral Council, and the Worship and Sacraments subcommittee of the Pastoral Reintegration Team, this memorandum comes to confirm the gradual restoration of publically celebrated Masses and liturgies to begin on Saturday, May 30, 2020 with the Vigil Mass of Pentecost Sunday.

In accord with the most recent decision of the Catholic Bishops of Ohio, a soft opening for public parish Masses is approved to begin with weekday Mass on Monday, May 25, observing all of the guidelines provided here. In order to provide for the spiritual well-being of the faithful of the Diocese of Toledo, while honoring Governor Mike DeWine's "Stay Safe Ohio" order, it is thus deemed permissible, at this time under current conditions, to begin to allow limited gatherings of people in churches for the celebration of Mass and other liturgies.

Please know of my sincere gratitude for all that has been done up until now in providing pastoral care for the faithful. As we move into this next phase of responding to the pandemic and its effects, be assured of my encouragement for all your efforts and of my trust that you will exercise the best practical and prudent judgment in addressing the challenges before us. Together, by God's grace, we will do our best to provide for the spiritual and pastoral needs of the faithful entrusted to our care.

During this pandemic, the diocese will continue to foster the common good of all by conducting our public gatherings in a manner that promotes the health and safety of our faithful and those whom they will encounter.

With full realization that the manner and continuance of limited gatherings are subject to change at any moment, the following guidelines will remain in effect at least until July 1, 2020, unless you are notified beforehand of any amendment, revocation, or continuance.

## **DISPENSATION FROM THE OBLIGATION TO ATTEND SUNDAY MASS**

The faithful of the Diocese of Toledo continue to be dispensed from their Sunday obligation until further notice.

Understanding the desire of so many of the faithful to return to our churches, it remains important for those who are at greater risk (the elderly, sick, those with pre-existing conditions) to refrain, and be encouraged to refrain, from returning to public liturgies until such time as they feel comfortable and confident to do so.

## **PROPER SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Pastors/Administrators/Pastoral Leaders should make every effort to ensure that appropriate social distancing before, during, and after liturgical celebrations is maintained. Methods will vary in light of the capacity of church buildings. These principles also apply to narthexes, chapels and other smaller rooms or gathering areas on the parish campus.

- Other than family/household members who live together, worshippers should be seated six feet apart in all directions. The Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader, in consultation with pastoral staff, is best suited to determine the logistics involved with any readjustment of seating arrangements as each parish church differs in design and layout. Once seating is determined, the exact number of people allowed safely to enter the church will be known and that number could be posted on all entrance doors and be clearly visible to the faithful. **The capacity is not to exceed 50% of fire code regulations per the “Stay Safe Ohio” order.**
- Unless appropriate social distancing and sanitizing can be reasonably assured, overflow areas such as the narthex, chapels, gathering areas, or “cry rooms” should not be used and are to be properly marked with signs discouraging congregating in these spaces.
- The location/number of stations for the distribution of Holy Communion should be considered and adjusted as necessary. A very limited number of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) could be utilized to assist with distribution of the Sacred Host, provided they are willing and comfortable doing so. Otherwise the priests and deacons who are present, may distribute Holy Communion themselves and are free to decide the manner of the Communion procession. Consideration should be given to limiting the number of liturgical ministers (lectors/readers, altar servers, ushers, etc.) in order to utilize those deemed necessary by the Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader.

- For the Communion procession, care should be taken to ensure that proper social distancing is maintained. For example, limiting the Communion procession to single file only or perhaps utilizing non-damaging painter's tape on the floor marking six foot intervals.
- Directors of Music also need to be mindful of proper social distancing and should consider reducing or eliminating choirs or ensembles during this time. The same safeguards should be observed for rehearsals. During the Sacred Liturgy a cantor could lead the faithful in chanting hymns (or the Entrance and Communion Antiphons) as well as the Mass Propers.
- Parishes are to discourage social gatherings before or after Mass/liturgy on the church campus. For example, no receptions, coffee and doughnuts, etc.
- Liturgies that would draw larger numbers of the faithful (e.g. First Communion, Confirmation, etc.) may be best celebrated at a time different from the regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. Parishes may need to offer additional Masses, at special times, to accommodate the faithful for such liturgies.

## **MASS SCHEDULES**

If pastorally advantageous or where possible, temporary additions or adjustments to the weekend Mass schedule might be considered to ensure proper social distancing. The faithful should be notified of any additional Masses or alteration to the schedule by means of social media, mailings or other communication.

Parishes are encouraged to continue or begin the commendable practice of providing live-stream broadcasts of their Masses/liturgies on social media for those who cannot physically be present.

## **PARTICULAR LITURGICAL MATTERS**

- Processions through the congregation at the beginning and end of the liturgy should be discontinued during this time.
- During this time the offertory procession is suspended. Bread and wine for Mass should continue to be kept apart from public areas and brought forward at the appropriate time only from the credence table.
- The Sign of Peace continues to be suspended during this time. The faithful should be reminded that there is to be no physical contact (handholding) during the Lord's Prayer, a gesture that is not prescribed in the *Roman Missal*. This is the moment to explain to the faithful of those congregations for whom this practice has become a custom that such a practice should be permanently discontinued even after the coronavirus pandemic.
- The distribution of the Precious Blood from the chalice continues to be suspended during this time.

- The reception of Holy Communion on the hand is to be strongly encouraged. The communicant's ungloved palms should be placed one on top of the other with the upper palm extended flat allowing the minister easily to place the Host on the communicant's hand without physical contact. It may be helpful for the celebrant to review this method of receiving the Eucharist before Mass begins.
- For the distribution of the Sacred Host gloves, tongs, tools or other implements are not to be used. Nothing that is not already foreseen by the norms of the Sacred Liturgy is to be introduced, such as any artificial/physical barriers placed between the minister and the communicant.
- Understanding that a certain sense of apprehensiveness and anxiety may exist, the faithful should be informed that they may refrain from receiving Holy Communion if they so desire, mindful that the requirement to receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season (Canon 920) may be fulfilled at another time during the year. Those who choose not to receive should be encouraged to make a spiritual communion.
- Priests, deacons, and all liturgical ministers should model good hygienic practices before, during, and after Mass. Priests, deacons, and EMHCs may continue discreetly to use hand sanitizer before Mass, before the Communion procession, and after Mass.

## **SAFETY AND SANITIZING PUBLIC SPACES**

The following are norms to be observed in our churches and other public spaces where possible and feasible:

- Baptismal fonts and holy water stoops should remain empty.
- Water for baptism is to be changed and blessed before each baptism. Blessed water should be properly disposed in the ground.
- Sacred Vessels should continue to be washed after each Mass, preferably with hot soapy water.
- All liturgical vestments, including server albs, are to be regularly cleaned.
- High use areas within the church should be wiped down with disinfectant before and after each liturgy, including pews, chairs, and ambos (perhaps utilizing fogging sprayers that disperse disinfectant in larger areas).
- Door handles, push plates, and knobs should be sanitized after each liturgy.
- Doors may be propped open to avoid repeated contact and to allow for better ventilation. Interior doors may be kept open during liturgies while outer doors could be closed in order to discourage an excess number of people entering the church thus violating the capacity

allowed in the “Stay Safe Ohio” order. Best prudent pastoral judgment, concern and sensitivity should be extended to the faithful if the church has already reached capacity.

- Restroom facilities should be cleaned and sanitized after each liturgy. Items such as soap and disposable towels should be regularly checked in order to maintain an adequate supply.
- All hymnals and missalettes (and other items) should be removed and stored for the duration of the pandemic. At each liturgy, disposable worship aids could be distributed, then discarded. The use of digital projection and screens is encouraged during this time. As always, appropriate copyright licenses are to be respected and followed.
- Bulletins should be placed on tables near the exits for the faithful. They should be spread out on the tables to avoid any unnecessary contact.
- There should be no collection taken up during the Mass at this time. Collection baskets/donation boxes could be placed near the interior doors of the church so that the faithful may deposit their envelopes inside as they enter or depart. This avoids any passing of collection baskets from person to person. Pastors/Administrators/Pastoral Leaders are to use prudent judgment to ensure proper security for these baskets/donation baskets. Money counters should also be limited in number and use proper social distancing and hygiene protocols when performing their task.

## **GOOD HYGIENIC PRACTICES**

- Pastors should make every effort to communicate clearly good hygienic practices and liturgical guidelines to their parishioners in light of continuing public health concerns.
- Those who are elderly, sick, symptomatic or at greater risk should be strongly encouraged to stay home.
- Face masks/coverings are highly encouraged for those in the congregation and left to the prudent discretion of the Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader for the liturgical ministers. Per the Ohio Department of Health, face masks/coverings are not placed on children under the age of two.
- Hand sanitizer should be made available at all entrances to the church building.

## **OTHER SACRAMENTS AND LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS**

Individual auricular confessions, baptisms, weddings, funerals, Quinceañeras, and Anointing of the Sick may continue to be celebrated at this time, provided that limited capacity regulations are met and the faithful observe proper social distancing and hygiene.

### ***First Communion Masses and Confirmation Masses***

These Masses may be scheduled at this time by the Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader provided that the appropriate capacity and proper social distancing are observed and sanitizing requirements

are followed. The Pastor/Administrator/Presbyteral Moderator and Chaplain, as previously announced, has been granted the faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation.

***Keeping Churches Open for Private Prayer and Eucharistic Adoration***

The church building may continue to be opened during part of the day for individual prayer provided that appropriate capacity, proper social distancing and sanitizing procedures are maintained. Eucharistic adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, following the aforementioned recommendations, is encouraged at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader.

***Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for the Elect and Candidates for Full Communion***

As previously communicated, these sacraments may be celebrated at the discretion of the Pastor/Administrator/Pastoral Leader. Families and guests may be invited provided that appropriate capacity, proper social distancing, and sanitizing procedures are observed.

**NOVENA TO THE HOLY SPIRIT**

As we near the conclusion of the Easter Season, our minds and hearts turn toward the risen and ascended Lord who sent the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. His promise to be with us always gives us hope and strength to persevere during these unsettling times. May the Holy Spirit empower us to face courageously whatever may come and cause us to rejoice in our blessings and even in our sufferings,

“knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5: 3-5).

I encourage all of you to join me with renewed vigor in praying our diocesan novena to the Holy Spirit in thanksgiving for the gradual restoration of public liturgies on the great Solemnity of Pentecost. The novena begins on Friday, May 22 and concludes on Saturday, May 30. The links to the novena, in both English and Spanish, may be found on the following diocesan webpage:  
[https://toledodiocese.org/page/easter#\\_pentecost](https://toledodiocese.org/page/easter#_pentecost)