



# ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

## **“Returning to Public Worship” Executive Summary**

The Archdiocese of New York is a large, diverse community of 2.81 million Catholics. We serve the city in Manhattan, Staten Island and the Bronx, plus Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, Westchester, Ulster, Rockland and Putnam counties. Since our founding in 1808, our mission has been to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, aware of the local area and the world, the spiritual and the material, the present and the future. We do this through ministry, service, prayer, education, and community, working with pastors, deacons, religious men and women, catechists, teachers, parish staff and volunteers at our nearly 300 parishes.

The lifeblood of the archdiocese’s mission stems from the Mass and the sacraments. It is here that our people are inspired to serve their brothers and sisters in the broader community, and are sent forth to engage in evangelization and charitable works.

Since the outset of the COVID-19 crisis in the New York region, our churches have been closed to public worship. This was, indeed, a sad but necessary step to take for the health and safety of our parishioners and local communities. And it has worked.

Healthcare and government officials have now announced a phased plan to begin to reopen. To date, the “NY Forward” plan does not outline a process by which houses of worship will reopen their doors.

The Catholic community in New York is eager to resume public worship in a safe and responsible manner and in coordination with state and local government and health officials. Our people believe that worship is an essential service. To that end, we are proposing a phased plan which follows the latest guidance from the CDC and which, at the same time, respects our traditions. We believe that public worship can continue to take place safely in an era of social distancing.

Our plan includes the following policies and procedures:

- Churches will be regularly sanitized and disinfected. Signage will be placed on entrance doors instructing anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the church. Parishioners must wear masks.
- Attendance at each individual Mass will be limited to no more than 25 percent of a church’s occupancy permit.
- No physical contact during the Sign of Peace will be permitted.
- Parish safety committees and ushers will be trained to receive parishioners and escort them to suitable seating arrangements set up for social distancing for the protection of priests and

parishioners. Ushers will wear masks and not make physical contact when greeting parishioners. Orderly arrivals and departures will be coordinated by ushers and parish security teams.

- Pews will be prepared to safeguard parishioners and will follow published protocols (see enclosed sample seating arrangements) based on:
  - Singles
  - Couples
  - Families with one child
  - Families with more than one child
- Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) will be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every liturgy. Restrooms will be cleaned between Masses.
- Hand sanitizer dispensaries will be available at all church entrances.
- At arrival and departure times, entrance doors will be propped open to limit contact with door handles. Where possible, pedestrian movement patterns will be instituted that will minimize the potential for close contact between parishioners, including dedicated access ways for entrance and departure. Signage will be used in implementing these measures.
- Utilization of lower church/parish center facilities for additional Masses if the Church is full, and live video display of services will be continued in order to alleviate any overflow in attendance.
- Holy water and baptismal fonts will be emptied.
- Additional Mass times may be added at the pastor's discretion.
- Worship aids will be discouraged. Online worship aids will be encouraged. If paper worship aids are used, they should be limited to one page, and attendees should be directed to take them with them after Mass. If worship aids are left in a pew, they must be collected and destroyed after each Mass.
- No paper bulletins will be distributed. Instead, parish bulletins/news will be posted to the parish website or emailed to parishioners.
- Non-essential gatherings will be suspended, including Children's Liturgy of the Word, post-Mass social gatherings/refreshments, etc.
- Communion will be distributed only via the Host; the Precious Blood will not be offered.
- A cantor will be permitted, but large choirs will not be used.
- Collection baskets will not be passed from person-to-person. Baskets with long handles will be allowed. Ushers taking the collection will wear masks and gloves. Large baskets may be placed at church exits for people to drop envelopes or donations. Ushers must immediately sanitize their hands after the collection.

- Offertory counters will wear gloves and masks, and practice social distancing.
- There will be no greeting of people after Mass.
- Tables and chairs in gathering areas will be put into storage so as not to invite people to use them.
- Baptismal pools or those with fonts that flow into a basin will be emptied after each use.

More detailed information regarding these policies may be found in the accompanying document, "Returning to Public Worship: Guidelines for Sacramental Celebrations."

By taking these steps, we are confident that we can assure our parishioners of their safety when attending church. For this reason, we are proposing that the Archdiocese begin its phased plan for reopening churches in tandem with the "NY Forward" Phase 2, which will coincide with the reopening of other professional and retail services.

The Archdiocese looks forward to working with state and local officials to realize its goal of bringing the Mass and sacraments back to the Catholic community responsibly and expeditiously.

# **“Returning to Public Worship”**

## **Guidelines for Sacramental Celebrations**

What follows is a series of recommended sacramental guidelines for archdiocesan parishes as we foresee a return to public worship in the forthcoming weeks and months. 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:

**Phase I** – Churches Open for Private Prayer and Confessions

**Phase II** - Celebration of Baptisms and Marriages (limited to 10 attendees)

**Phase III** - Celebration of the Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside of Mass

**Phase IV** – Celebration of Daily and Funeral Masses with Limited Attendance

**Phase V** – Celebration of Sunday Mass with Supervised Attendance

**Resumption of Full Parish Mass Schedules and Sacramental Activities**

Commencement dates and a detailed description of each phase will be announced by the Vicar General’s Office in the coming weeks, in consultation with health and government officials and in consideration of current health metrics. It is expected that different regions of the Archdiocese will begin the process of reopening at different times.

As our parishes prepare to return to public worship, these guidelines are being provided to pastors at this time to assist them in their pastoral planning as they develop policies and procedures that will be appropriate for their parish community and worship space. Pastors are encouraged to form a “reopening task force” consisting of 3-4 parishioners to assist in reviewing these guidelines and implementing them as will best fit the needs of their parish.

### **I. General Principles**

#### *A. Church Attendance*

1. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass is suspended until further notice.
2. Those who are at a higher risk for COVID-19 (i.e., those who are older than 65 or who have underlying health conditions) 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.
3. Those who feel in any way sick or who are worried about attendance should not enter the church.
4. In accord with current state policy, the faithful (over 2 years old) must wear cloth face coverings when in public, including when they come to church.
5. Attendees should sanitize their hands at the entrance of the church via sanitizer stations.
6. All present at Mass should sit 6 feet or more away from others. Families may sit together.

7. These items should be posted via signage at the entrance of the church. They should also be posted on the parish website or emailed to parishioners.

### *B. Preparing the Church*

1. Hand sanitizers should be placed near the entrances to the church. Face masks should be made available to all parishioners who need them, although those who return should be instructed to wear their own mask. Parishes should ensure that they have adequate supplies of hand sanitizer and face masks on hand for those who do not have their own. ICS may be contacted for assistance in ordering these items.

2. Entrance doors may be propped open to limit contact with door handles.

3. Points of ingress may be limited so that the numbers of those entering the church can be monitored and controlled. All points of egress must remain completely accessible.

4. Commonly touched surfaces and items in the church should be regularly cleaned and disinfected. Pews/pew tops, door handles, ambo, microphones, cruets, vessels, books, etc. should be cleaned and sanitized after every liturgy.

5. Holy water and baptismal fonts should be emptied.

6. Members of the congregation must be seated at least 6 feet apart from each other in all directions. Families may be seated together. Ushers should assist in helping those present to observe this rule, and they should be given training to properly carry out this task.

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. In implementing this policy, parishes will find that attendance at each individual Mass would be limited to roughly no more than 25% of a church's occupancy permit.

7. In areas where the faithful will stand in line (for example, when waiting to go to Confession or to receive Holy Communion), tape should be placed on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.

8. A plan for restroom use should be developed. The number of people who enter a restroom at the same time should be limited, and tape should be placed on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait, maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other. Restrooms should be sanitized after each liturgy and regularly.

9. "Cry rooms" and other ancillary areas in the church should be closed and locked.

### *C. Churches Open for Private Prayer/Eucharistic Exposition*

1. A parish staff member or volunteer should be stationed at the front door when the church is open to ensure that no more than the permitted number of people are present inside the church at one time and that everyone is seated according to social distancing guidelines.

2. After each visitor leaves, staff/volunteers should sanitize that area of the pew.
3. Doorknobs and other high-traffic areas of the church should be frequently sanitized.

#### *D. Music*

1. Large choirs are not recommended at this time. A cantor and organ (or other accompanying instrument) may be used. As well, a small group of singers may be spaced out very well apart from each other in a choir loft or other designated area away from the other members of the congregation.
2. Hymnals and missalettes should be removed from the pews. Printed single-use or online worship aids accessible on a smart phone may be used. Music that is commonly known may be selected, including popular hymns and Mass settings, as well as psalms with a common refrain. A small schola may sing proper chants.
3. Parishes are reminded to respect all copyrights when reproducing Mass texts, readings, and music.

## **II. Celebration of Mass**

#### *A. Mass Attendance*

1. Due to the limited number of persons permitted in the church at any one time (approximately 25% of the permitted occupancy), Masses may be scheduled with greater frequency as needs dictate. Attendance may be based on a first-come, first-served policy, or allocated by some other system, such as a rotation based on the first letter of last names, assigning a Mass time per registered family, an online ticketing system like Eventbrite, etc. Whichever system a parish chooses to use to monitor the number of people present, some space designation should be allowed for walk-in attendance.
2. When considering the addition of scheduled Masses, pastors should bear in mind the canonical principle that priests should not celebrate Mass more than twice on a weekday or three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation (Can. 905).
3. "Drive-in" or outdoor Masses are a real possibility, where the Mass is celebrated in a location visible to the faithful who remain in their cars. For example, a Mass could be celebrated on the front steps of a church, or in a church parking lot (perhaps on a platform erected for this purpose). In these cases, Communion should be distributed from central locations and *not* brought from car to car.

#### *B. Ministers*

1. A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should not celebrate public Masses or administer sacraments. The same holds for other ministers who might serve at a Mass, as well as for sacristans, ushers, etc. It is recommended that altar servers not be used at this time.

2. Priests, deacons, readers, and sacristans are to wash/sanitize their hands before and after Mass, and before and after the distribution of Communion.
3. The priest celebrant and other ministers should not generally wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass. Ministers of Holy Communion, however, should wear a mask (but not gloves) during the time of distribution.
4. To the greatest extent possible, all ministers (deacons, lectors, sacristans) should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other.

### *C. Ritual Considerations*

1. The priest may place the *Missal* on a stand at the chair or even on the altar when he recites the presidential prayers, rather than having a server hold the book.
2. The offertory procession should be omitted.
3. The *lavabo* should be performed by the priest alone, with hand sanitizer as well as water.
4. The invitation to the faithful to exchange a sign of peace should be omitted.
5. Ciboria with hosts to be consecrated should be placed on a separate corporal away from the main chalice and paten.

### *D. Distribution of Holy Communion*

1. When preparing for Mass, sacristans must carefully wash their hands prior to touching the altar breads and pouring the wine; a mask and gloves are encouraged.
2. All vessels containing the bread and wine should remain covered until placed on the altar.
3. At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that Holy Communion will be distributed in the usual way, 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. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
4. The Precious Blood should *not* be distributed to the faithful, *nor* should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction.
5. The minister should perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before and after distributing Holy Communion.
6. All ministers of Holy Communion should wear a mask during the time of distribution.
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.

8. The faithful should approach the altar and receive Holy Communion in the usual way, observing a 6-foot distance between each communicant.

9. Given the frequency of direct contact with saliva in the distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue, every consideration should be made by each individual to receive the host reverently in open hands for the protection of all.

10. If the minister senses that his/her fingers have made contact with the communicant's hands or mouth, the minister should pause, place the ciborium on a corporal, and use hand sanitizer. A small table may be placed near each communion station for this purpose. (An ablution cup may also be on the table, and the minister may purify fingers in the ablution cup before using hand sanitizer.) The minister may repeat this process as often as necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, to use hand sanitizer between each communicant unless contact is made.

11. Ministers should not place their hands on the heads of children or adults who are not receiving Communion in the form of a "blessing" during the distribution of Communion.

12. At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) should return the remaining hosts to the altar or tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).

#### *E. Collection*

1. Special provision should be made for the collection. Baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets may be acceptable if the ushers can remain a suitable distance from others. Parishes may also wish to set up central boxes or collection points where the faithful can place their contributions. Signage and announcements can encourage the use of WeShare. Offertory money should be placed in a tamper-evident bag, logged, and kept in the safe for at least three days before being counted.

### **III. Additional Sacramental Considerations**

#### *A. Baptism*

1. The minister should wear a mask throughout the celebration of the sacrament.

2. To the extent possible, a minimum 6-foot distance should be kept between the celebrant and others during the ceremony. A limited period of proximity during the anointings, the pouring of water, and the explanatory rites is permissible and necessary.

3. Water for baptism is to be changed and blessed before each baptism.

#### *B. Confirmation*

1. The anointing associated with Confirmation may *not* take place via the use of a cotton ball or other instrument. The anointing must be performed by the celebrant directly with his hand.



### *C. Anointing of the Sick*

1. It is recommended during this period to limit the celebration of the Anointing of the Sick to those who are dying and those about to undergo serious surgery. Communal celebrations of the sacrament should not be scheduled at this time.
2. The minister should wear a mask and gloves throughout the celebration of the sacrament. As well, he should use hand sanitizer when entering and leaving the room of the sick.
3. With the exception of the anointing itself, the minister should maintain at least a 6-foot distance between himself and the recipient of the sacrament at all times.
4. The anointing may take place via the use of a cotton ball or other instrument, and only once on the forehead or another suitable area of the body. Cotton balls should not be reused and may be disposed of via incineration or burial.
5. Priests must follow all guidelines set by medical institutions, including the use of PPE. In most cases, only hospital chaplains will be able to anoint in these settings due to limited access to PPE and the training needed in order to properly wear it.

### *D. Reconciliation*

1. Both the priest and penitent should wear a mask throughout the celebration of the sacrament.
2. A 6-foot distance between the priest and the penitent must be maintained when hearing confessions. In many cases, this may necessitate the temporary use of a partition in an open space or classroom, as most confessional "boxes" will not allow for a 6-foot separation between priest and penitent.
3. It is advisable to designate an area where the faithful can wait in line while maintaining a 6-foot distance from others. Floors should be marked to indicate the required distance.

### *E. Additional Questions*

1. Questions regarding these and other sacramental practices during the period of phased reopening may be directed to the Vicar General's Office ([VG@archny.org](mailto:VG@archny.org)) or the Liturgy Office ([liturgy@archny.org](mailto:liturgy@archny.org)).