



**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 resume 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 resume these public 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 through September 6, 2020.

Some have asked why we are moving ahead with public Masses as of May 29<sup>th</sup> even though the State of Michigan has extended its stay-at-home order into June. This is a good question. First of all, each of these state orders has recognized the exemption enjoyed by religious communities in light of the principle of religious liberty and our God-given right and duty to worship God. So our limiting of public worship these past two months has not been due solely to state laws, but rather to our desire to help promote the common good, a very important Christian principle.

What has been the goal of this attentiveness to the common good? It has been clearly stated—“to flatten the curve,” that is, to help prevent our medical personnel from being overwhelmed. The goal has never been to defeat the virus entirely. That may be achieved by herd immunity or by a vaccine, something that is most likely a year or more away. We have achieved that goal. We have flattened the curve. Now, along with many other institutions in civil society across Michigan, we are gradually and cautiously progressing out of lockdown so that more and more essential services—such as worshipping God at Holy Mass—can resume with all the appropriate health and safety precautions in place. While sanitizing and social distancing will significantly reduce the risk of viral transmission, it is likely that some infections will still occur; we cannot entirely eliminate risks.

While the full text of the guidelines follows below (consistent with the recent [CDC guidelines for communities of faith](#)), 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 sick! I encourage you to stay home if you are elderly or have an underlying medical condition. Parents may wish to leave small children at home 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 respiratory droplets are a method of disease transfer, I strongly urge those who do attend to receive the Eucharist in the hand so as not to breathe 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**

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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 September 6, 2020. Parishes should plan to livestream Masses even after this date for those who cannot attend because of 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 (e.g., participating in a broadcast of the Sunday Mass or praying the Liturgy of the Hours) and participating in a spiritual or corporal work 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 gradually. We will begin on Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>. 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 guidelines. 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 effect on May 29<sup>th</sup> and continue until such time as public health and safety permit greater liberty.**

### 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.
- Doorknobs 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.
- Improve air quality throughout the church building where possible by increasing outdoor ventilation and eliminating recirculation.
- The altar should be set with everything prepared for Mass so that the priest's hands are the only hands that need touch the Roman Missal and vessels related to the altar. In lieu of this, a small credence table might be prepared for the priest's use next to the altar.
- Seating: at least every other pew should be blocked off so as to create six feet of distance between households.
- Visibly post the 25% seating capacity of the parish for the benefit of parishioners (e.g., Seating Capacity = 150).
- A small supply of face coverings, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes should be on hand in case someone has forgotten to bring their own.

#### Holy Water:

Holy water fonts should be left empty

- The normal reservoir of Holy Water should remain 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 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 kept to an absolute minimum 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 especially vulnerable to the coronavirus because of age or health issues should consider not attending public Masses. If they do attend, they should take extreme precautions. (Please refer to this [list of vulnerable populations](#) from the CDC.)
- Parents may wish to leave small children at home, if feasible, since children under the age of seven often lack the ability to follow hygienic and distancing guidelines and so may more easily contract and pass along illness to the rest of the family. If you do decide to bring young children, please use wipes to clean your area more thoroughly before your children are seated and bring your own hand sanitizer for more frequent application.
- Nursing infants are welcome.
- All those in attendance must wear face masks in order to “reduce the spray of a person’s spit or infectious respiratory droplets.” As per the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), “The purpose of people wearing masks in public right now is to protect the community. Since many people who have COVID-19 don’t have symptoms, wearing masks can help reduce the possibility that someone with no symptoms could transmit the disease to others.
  - Children under the age of 2 years should not wear face coverings. Please consult the American Academy of Pediatrics page on [Masks and Children During COVID-19](#).
  - In addition, anyone who has trouble breathing, or who is unable to remove the cover without assistance need not wear a mask.

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 is to be omitted until further notice.

- Entrance 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 may increase 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 spoken responses in a soft voice.

#### Personnel

- A musician and/or a cantor.
- No need for servers.
- No more than 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 (see below).
- There should be no distribution of the Precious Blood. (Provision can be made for someone who is allergic to wheat to receive from a dedicated chalice.)
- 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 thoroughly 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 to come forward 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.
- Alternatively, with every other pew empty, Holy Communion might be distributed by utilizing the empty pew instead of having households come forward. A server would then stand nearby with a tray carrying an unfolded corporal, an ablution bowl, and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- Given the Church's existing guidance on the reception of Holy Communion (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 the minister of Holy Communion 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 the minister's lower finger and the 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 a properly trained minister, can be done by releasing the host carefully into the recipient's mouth, avoiding direct contact. This method allows 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 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, the distribution of Holy Communion in the hand has risks as well. This risk can be reduced by communicants meticulously handwashing immediately before Mass and sanitizing 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 or if he believes that his hand has been breathed on, 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 group would be best. It does not seem necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between communicants in the same household unless he makes actual contact.
- At the conclusion of Holy Communion, the remaining hosts are returned to the tabernacle, the priest 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, while conforming 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.

### Communion to the homebound

- Holy Communion should not generally be taken to the homebound at this time unless every precaution can be taken.
- Holy Communion may be taken by a member of the same household to someone not able to attend Mass. Each should be properly trained in the reverence due to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament as well as in carrying out the *Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass*. By way of reminder, the Sacred Host is to be transported only in a pyx, and the pastor should make note of who is having Holy Communion brought to them.

### 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 the pandemic. 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 while conforming with the recommended percentage of the church’s seating capacity.

### Funerals

Celebration of Masses of Christian Burial may continue while conforming with the recommended percentage of the church’s seating capacity.

### Sacrament of Penance

The Sacrament of Penance should be offered at regular times and by appointment, with proper social distancing and masking.

### Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament should take place while conforming with 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](http://www.dioceseoflansing.org/coronavirus). Please share this website with your parish communities.