



RICHARD FRANK STIKA
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

DECREE

Whereas, due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 13, 2020, I dispensed the faithful of the Diocese of Knoxville from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; and

Whereas, while entering into any public space over the last year has included some risk, the safety and health protocols implemented at our parishes have proven to be extremely effective, and I am unaware of any issues of community spread happening at a public Mass; and

Whereas, prudent health precautions will still be taken by every parish, but as the worst of the pandemic seems to be behind us, and access to COVID-19 vaccines for those who desire to receive it has increased, the time has come that the general dispensation is no longer necessary;

Therefore, through this decree, effective the weekend of May 22-23, 2021, Pentecost Sunday, **the general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is reinstated** in the Diocese of Knoxville.

1. This obligation does not apply to those who are ill, those who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another serious or contagious illness, those who are confined to their home, a hospital, or a nursing facility, those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound, those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own, those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category, and those who have significant fear or anxiety of COVID-19 exposure by attending Mass
2. One should consult their pastor if questions arise about the obligation to attend Mass.
3. Also effective the weekend of May 22-23, 2021, Pentecost Sunday, **the social distance mandate within the pews throughout the entire church will be reduced to 3 feet** versus the previous 6 feet restriction. With this new restriction in place, every pew may be used for the seating of parishioners.
4. Understanding that the pandemic conditions could change over the next 3 months and that I must remain open to amending the requirements in this decree, **the requirement to wear a protective facemask during Mass will be lifted the weekend of July 31-August 1, 2021.**
5. Effective May 24, 2021, chancery staff and parish office staff will no longer be required to wear facemasks. Those employees who are uncomfortable with the lifting of this requirement may still wear facemasks if they so desire.
6. The prior restriction from passing collection baskets from person-to-person during the Offertory is lifted. Those concerned about reinstating this practice should be encouraged to bring personal hand sanitizer to use after passing the basket. Of course, pastors should continue to encourage parishioners to use hand sanitizer provided at the entrance of their churches.
7. All other restrictions that I have required the last several months remain in place. Specifically:
 - A. Holy water fonts should remain completely dry. Remove all hymnals, Daily Missals and other items normally found in the pew book holders. Individual liturgy/music sheets may be made available so long as the parishioner takes the sheet with them as they exit the church.

B. Do not hold hands during the recitation of the Our Father.

C. Omit the Sign of Peace or exchange it without physical contact (bow of the head).

D. Holy Communion shall be distributed as follows: A single Holy Communion distribution point will be located at the front of the church and at the rear of the church. For those church buildings that have an altar rail they may distribute to communicants who are kneeling at the rail and are a minimum of 3-feet apart. Pastors serving at churches that have transepts may locate their distribution points at the far right and far left ends of the transepts respectively. An assigned usher will call parishioners to the Holy Communion distribution points by individual pew/row via the center aisle (or side aisle for those with transepts). **IMPORTANT – regardless of the location of the Holy Communion distribution points (front/rear, communion rail, far end of each transept or at another church campus location where the Mass is being simulcast) the following procedures are mandatory (non-negotiable):** Once you leave your pew/chair you will proceed single file (maintaining 3-feet apart) to the distribution point. Immediately before you reach the distribution point you will sanitize your hands with 70% alcohol-based sanitizing gel/solution (which will be on a small table directly in front of the distribution point). Standing on the floor-marked X (or kneeling at the 3-foot marked locations along the communion rail), you will extend your arms and hands toward the priest/deacon with the palm of your non-writing hand facing up and completely flat supported by your writing hand. The priest/deacon (who at this particular time will be wearing a protective facemask) will then place the Host onto your palm without touching your hand. The communicant will immediately consume the Host, place their protective mask back on and proceed to their pew/seat. The reception of the Sacred Host on the tongue will be permitted so long as the following restrictions are **strictly enforced:**

- The distribution of the Sacred Host on the tongue will take place in a separate, distinct line dedicated only to those desiring to receive on the tongue. If this cannot be achieved then the distribution of the Sacred Host on the tongue will be received after the Mass has ended.
- The cleric or assigned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion **MUST** disinfect his/her hands in-between **EACH** communicant.
- Those parishes who offer the Extraordinary Form of the *Missale Romanum* in a Mass may distribute the Sacred Host on the tongue using the normal communion lines – however, the cleric **MUST** disinfect his/her hands in-between **EACH** communicant.

8. Singing is permitted (both choir and parishioners). If the cantor/organist/choir member is not separated by a Flexiglas screen/partition they must also wear a facemask and maintain 3-feet, social distancing.
9. With regard to meetings and gatherings, food and beverages may be made available in either pre-packaged or pre-portioned containers. You may also serve food and drink with designated persons serving or plating the food. Designated servers must be masked, gloved and sanitized. Designated servers will be the only ones having direct contact with the food, serving utensils, and/or drink. Food and drink should be plated or served in such a way that allows persons to approach a table and retrieve their own food and drink, or that of their family group. Disposable plates and cups are recommended, with each person discarding their own items after the meal.
10. Once all parishioners have exited the church or meeting space, pastors must ensure the cleaning and disinfecting of touched surfaces (i.e. pews, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks) with household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for these surfaces.

I encourage our faithful in East Tennessee to pray for an end to the pandemic, for those who have suffered a loss, and for a rejuvenated faith, especially for those who have drifted from their faith during this time. With an assurance of prayers for the holiness and good health of all, I extend my apostolic blessing to the faithful of the Diocese of Knoxville.

Given at the Chancery this 5th day of May in the Year of Our Lord 2021.



Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville

Deacon Sean K. Smith
Chancellor