

The process of reopening the churches and resuming public Masses will occur in three steps. It will be based on a review of data from the Iowa Department of Public Health that considers a downward trend in the number of new cases, of deaths, of COVID-19 patients admitted per day in hospitals, the percentage of positive tests, and the reproduction rate. Details for the celebration of sacraments and funerals are provided in a separate document. All Catholics in the Diocese of Davenport are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass until further notice.

Step 1 reopens the churches for private prayer at the discretion of the pastor or PLC if a process of regular cleaning and disinfection can be maintained. Everyone must wear face protection. No more than 10 people may be in the church at any one time. Private Masses continue, which ideally are livestreamed, or recorded and posted. There is no public celebration of the Mass. The celebration outside of Mass of Baptisms, weddings, and funerals can include up to ten people. Visits for Communion other than Viaticum are suspended. Adoration chapels remain closed. Staff should continue to work from home as much as possible. Meetings and faith formation continue to be held virtually.

Step 2 resumes public Masses with some restrictions. Public worship may take place at the discretion of the pastor or PLC if physical distancing, cleaning, and disinfecting can be maintained. Everyone must wear face protection. Those who are at a greater risk of infection due to age and/or health condition should stay home. Clergy who fit into this category are not obligated to preside at the sacraments or may modify how they do so.

Participants maintain six-foot distancing by sitting in every third pew and horizontally apart from other households. Distancing should be maintained while gathering, during the Communion procession, and following the Mass. While maintaining the rubrics of the liturgy, Mass should not be extended any longer than necessary. Singing should be omitted. The gifts should be covered on the altar, with the vessels filled in advance and not brought in procession.

The entrance procession should be re-examined. The Gloria is recited. The psalm and all responses during the liturgy are spoken. The sign of peace is exchanged verbally, not physically. Each person should sanitize their hands before receiving Communion. When distribution is completed, distributors sanitize their hands. Offerings may be left in baskets.

Other church spaces may be used in addition to or instead of the church itself if physical distancing is maintained. Outdoor spaces on church property may be used either as overflow or with Mass celebrated entirely outside. Audio should be provided by outside speakers, AM radio or livestreaming. If a parking lot is used, vehicles should park in every other space. Vehicle occupants should process from their vehicles to receive Communion while wearing face protection and remaining six feet apart. Or Communion will be brought to the vehicles.

Public celebration of Exposition and Adoration may take place if limited to thirty minutes, physical distancing is maintained, and face protection is worn. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not to visit homes. Pastors will be given the faculty to administer Confirmation.

Indoor meetings and faith formation sessions should be held virtually. In-person meetings may take place outdoors if safe distances and face protection are maintained. Indoor meetings of less than thirty minutes may be held if proper distancing and face protection are maintained.

Step 3 relaxes some of the liturgical restrictions. Seating in every other row can occur, and a six-foot distance should be maintained between households horizontally. Cantors may be used but without choirs or hymns. The Gloria, psalm and responses may be sung. Offerings may be accepted using long-handled baskets or left in baskets at the entrance. Bulletins may be distributed.

Exposition and Adoration may take place with ten or fewer people present. Baptisms may be celebrated at Mass, but baptisms of more than one child should take place outside of Mass. Weddings and funerals may be celebrated at Mass. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who are not at high risk of infection may visit the sick (not COVID-19 patients) and homebound if necessary. Communal celebration of the Anointing of the Sick is discouraged.

In-person meetings may take place outdoors if safe distances are maintained. Indoor meetings of less than sixty minutes may be held if proper distancing and face protection is maintained.

Once there is “herd immunity” – probably through the wide availability of a safe and effective vaccine – there will be a return to “normal” liturgical practices, initially with the kind of precautions taken during the flu season.