

FAQ – Is It Safe to Attend Mass?

In a word, “Yes!” St. Thomas and St. Johns have been open for daily Mass and confessions since June without incident. The pews are sanitized after each Mass, social distancing markings have been placed on the floor to help keep the spacing in the Communion lines, and every other pew has been closed to keep a safe distance between the rows. Those in attendance are asked to assist us by observing the following rules: (1.) please do not attend if you are experiencing cold / flu symptoms or an elevated temperature, (2.) please wear a mask over your nose and mouth during the entire liturgy with the exception of receiving Holy Communion, and (3.) please use the hand sanitizing stations available or bring your own hand sanitizer. Other procedural changes are announced prior to each Mass: congregational singing has been suspended for the time being along with exchanging a Sign of Peace and holding hands at the Our Father. Collection baskets have been removed and offertory gifts are placed individually into a box in the gathering space. Please see the [complete list of precautions](#) on our parish website.

Here are the answers to some common concerns:

- **Some people take off their mask before receiving Holy Communion.**

Actually, that is the recommended practice per our [diocesan instructions](#) for a number of reasons: (1.) Even if someone is infected, momentary exposure to them is still a low risk. Health guidelines for quarantining someone are based on being exposed to someone at close range (within 6') for 10 minutes or more. (2.) If you take your mask down just before receiving Communion, you can use both hands and touch the strings, which is more hygienic. If you lower your mask while holding the Host, you are more likely to drop the Host as well as touch your mask in front of your mouth, where it is most moist and germy. This is more likely to spread germs to your hands, the pews, etc.

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.

- **Some people still receive Holy Communion on the tongue.**

Although the parish highly recommends receiving Communion in the hand, liturgical law allows reception on the tongue, and it is not for parishes to say otherwise.

- **The clergy / extraordinary ministers don't sanitize their hands after giving Holy Communion on the tongue.**

The diocesan practice is to re-sanitize our hands IF we make contact with someone while distributing Communion. Actually, with experience, it is often easier to give someone Communion on the tongue and avoid contact. However, per [diocesan policy](#), the clergy / extraordinary ministers will re-sanitize their hands if they make contact.

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, and then use hand sanitizer.

- **It doesn't appear that everyone is social-distancing properly in the Communion line.** That may be so, as family members will often sit and stand closer to one another as they have been together throughout the pandemic. The goal is to maintain social distance between families or individuals of different households.

In short, all of these situations are within the allowances of our health guidelines. Our churches have been open and operating by these policies since June without issue, which points to the reasonableness of these precautions. However, for those who are especially vulnerable, our dispensation from Sunday and holy day obligations has been extended until Feb. 16, 2021, and our liturgies are available via [livestream](#) and the [TV Outreach Mass](#).

As our churches are limited in capacity for the sake of social-distancing, special overflow seating will be made available for Advent and Christmas as needed. And *Senior Friendly Masses* are offered each month at St. Thomas to care for the most vulnerable. Our next Senior Masses will be on Wed., Dec. 16, at 10am and Christmas Day at 8am (St. Thomas only).

Thank you for your cooperation in keeping everyone safe!