



DIocese OF AUSTIN
VICAR GENERAL'S OFFICE
MEMORANDUM

TO: PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

CC: MOST REVEREND JOE S. VÁSQUEZ, DAVID WOOD, DEACON RON WALKER

FROM: VERY REVEREND JAMES A. MISKO, V.G. *JAM*

SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE TEMPORARY COVID-19 PROTOCOLS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

DATE: APRIL 30, 2020

While the document titled *Temporary COVID-19 Protocols for the Celebration of the Sacraments for the Diocese of Austin* is taken directly from [The Governor's Report to Open Texas](#) and considers items that we ***must*** follow in our parishes, this memo is intended as a resource for you and your parish and is a document that you ***should*** follow either in its entirety or as needed for your particular community. Thank you for taking the time to work these protocols into your parish liturgies.

• ***Attendance:***

- Because many people will still not have the ability to attend Mass, Bishop Vásquez extends his dispensation of the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this pandemic.
 - Parishioners should feel morally secure in choosing to stay home.
- The following protocols pertain to both Sunday and daily Masses:
 - Parishes may either return to their regular schedules for Masses and Reconciliation or establish a temporary schedule that best fits the parish needs at this time. Please contact the Vicar General if your parish will use a temporary schedule.
 - Appropriate distance between persons is a priority with a 6-foot distance in all directions.
 - The 6-foot distance pertains to individual persons or family units living in the same home.
 - Parishes should rope off pews to ensure the 6-foot distance is maintained in all directions.

- By employing this 6-foot measure, parishes will be able to seat around 25% of their capacity.
 - When/if we arrive at stage 2 on May 18, parishes will be able to seat around 50% of capacity.
 - Continue live streaming of at least one Mass per weekend or promote another live streamed/broadcast Mass for those not able to attend or those who do not feel it is safe to return at this time.
- ***Individual and group protocols:***
 - All parishioners 65 or older are encouraged to remain home.
 - Those with pre-existing conditions or who are immuno-compromised should remain home.
 - Any person who is ill should remain at home.
 - Designate an area inside the church reserved for the at-risk population or offer a service for at-risk attendees only.
 - This will result in a distance protocol that is farther than the 6-foot recommendation.
 - Provide hand sanitation opportunities at the entrances of the church.
 - 6-foot spacing protocol includes:
 - Cuing for Reconciliation
 - The use of tape on the floor may help in establishing proper distance while waiting to celebrate the sacrament.
 - Consider hospitality ministers to assist during confessions.
 - Entering and leaving the building for Mass (this will require hospitality ministers to determine and monitor how entering and leaving may be accomplished in an orderly manner).
 - It is recommended that parishes use minimal entrances to help in managing the flow of parishioners. It is important that all doors in the building remain able to be opened from the inside for emergency exiting.
 - Masks are not required by the governor's order, but are recommended. However, a pastor may require parishioners to wear masks. If this is the case, he may consider having extra masks available should someone arrive without a mask.
 - Placement of signage at your entrances reminding people of protocols and hygiene practices.
 - Parishioners should not congregate in the narthex after Mass. Priests and deacons may consider forgoing the personal greetings before or after mass to avoid any gathering.
 - Hospitality ministers should disinfect regularly touched surfaces after each mass, including pew railings and door handles.
 - Disposable paper worship aids may be used in lieu of hymnals and missalettes.
 - It may be beneficial to keep doors propped open so that people are not touching the handles.

- ***Liturgical considerations:***

- Parishes with chapels should celebrate daily Mass in the large sanctuary rather than the chapel.
- Communion in the hand remains the temporary expectation.
 - Distribution on the tongue, while not recommended, may not be denied in accordance with canon law. The reception of Holy Communion is not required for the fulfillment of one's obligation since the obligation is presently dispensed.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood remains temporarily suspended.
 - Procession for Holy Communion
 - Parishes should have one, single-file, communion line in order to maintain 6-foot distancing.
- 6-foot distancing should be evident among the liturgical ministers in the sanctuary.
- On the altar, the extra ciboria should be spread out from the main corporal to avoid the presider speaking over the open ciboria.
 - The main celebrant should only have one presider host over which he speaks.
- If a concelebrant(s) is/are present, use multiple chalices or use intinction.
- If a deacon is present, the deacon may forgo reception of the Precious Blood.
- Liturgical ministers assisting at the Mass should be limited as much as possible.
- A pastor must require liturgical ministers to self-screen prior to serving at Mass. This may be done with a simple questionnaire that asks pertinent questions regarding symptoms.
- All Eucharistic ministers, both ordinary and extraordinary, should sanitize hands prior to distribution of Holy Communion and after the distribution.
 - The sanitizer should be dry before receiving Holy Communion in the hand.
- Eucharistic ministers, including priests and deacons, may wear face masks when distributing Holy Communion to mitigate droplets over the hosts.
- Communicants, if wearing a face mask, when two or three people away from receiving, should pull down the mask below the chin to consume the host and then immediately recover the mouth and nose.
 - The communicant may also choose to say Amen in his/her heart rather than out loud.
- The minister should place the host vertically in the hand and let the host fall into the communicant's palm without touching the hand.
- The giving of peace at Mass should not include physical touch.
 - A priest may also forgo the giving of peace all together.
- Baptisms may be celebrated following the 6-foot distancing protocol as much as possible.
 - Refrain, as much as possible, from physical touch of the person being baptized throughout the rite.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation may be celebrated observing the 6-foot protocol.
 - The location of the place of confession should be as open as possible with flow of air.
 - Both the priest and the penitent may wear a mask.
 - It will be beneficial to have a hospitality minister scheduled to help manage this while the priest is hearing confessions.
- Funerals may be celebrated with the same protocols as the Mass.

- If possible and not overly burdensome, you may offer livestream overflow Masses with proper distancing in both locations.
 - Parishes with parochial vicars may consider dual Masses in separate locations, following distancing guidelines and if not overly burdensome to the health of the priests.
 - Supply priests should only be used if the parish priest is unavailable either by illness or being out of town.
 - It is important for the safety of our retired priests that parishes refrain from asking them to supply. They are in one of the most at-risk demographics for the coronavirus.
 - Parishes may also consider providing outdoor Masses where it might be easier for people to appropriately distance.
 - Clergy should dismiss specific sections of the church so that social distancing is maintained during the exit.
 - For example, dismiss from the back to the front asking the people of God to allow each pew to exit in order with 6-foot spacing.
 - Do not pass the collection baskets.
 - Place offertory stations at entrances or key locations.
 - In lieu of the collection basket, invite people to make their usual gift online or set up recurring electronic giving from their home or using their smart phone.
 - Hospitality ministers should sanitize the top of pew backs in between each Mass; particularly the place where people place their hands.
- ***Administrative considerations:***
 - Liturgies that have been postponed may now be celebrated, including:
 - Weddings - Funerals/Memorial Services - Baptisms – First Communions
 - For daily Mass, parishes with chapels should use the main sanctuary to aid in distancing.
 - Parishes may consider alternating the celebration of Mass between the main church and a chapel/parish hall.
 - This will allow each space to be adequately sanitized in between Masses.
 - Parishes may consider propping doors open to limit touch points.
 - It remains of utmost value to cultivate a welcoming sense of hospitality when scheduling liturgies that have been delayed.
 - Parishes should schedule hospitality/usher meetings to train them in these temporary protocols.
 - Clear signage explaining the distancing requirements and other protocols is helpful.
 - The internet has many options of infographics that show best hygiene practices.
 - The CDC and state of Texas has excellent examples of infographics that you may print and use on your doors and bulletin boards.
 - Make sure the infographics are not trademarked or proprietary documents.
 - Ministries selling breakfast or lunch after Mass should only do so as to-go meals.
 - We suggest, for the present time, to not offer childcare services during Mass.
 - For any parish where a priest is either positive for COVID-19 or in self-quarantine awaiting a result from a test, please contact Fr. Tim Nolt, Vicar for Priests, for further recommendation.