

THE CONTINUING RETURN TO PUBLIC WORSHIP

Diocese of Columbus

We returned to public worship of at Mass on Memorial Day with a soft opening, and on Pentecost weekend with our first Sunday Masses since the nationwide shut down of public Masses. Pastors were given flexibility regarding the timing of this reopening and the implementation of the details. Pastors' concerns and input were sought regarding reopening. Additionally, healthcare professionals assisted with guidelines and best practices for the reopening of parishes and diocesan facilities. We continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 while we offer Mass and the sacraments to our parishioners. While the implementation of the details of reopening is still in the hands of the pastors, now is a good time to begin to unify practices. The purpose of this correspondence is to share broadly the details and policies intended to keep moving us closer to "normal" while still maintaining a high level of reverence in the celebration of the sacraments and safety and comfortability in worship for the clergy and faithful of the diocese.

I. MASS/ ADORATION/ SACRAMENTS

- A. RETURN:** We should be in the mindset that the first phase of the return is now over, and we are prudently moving toward normalcy while maintaining precautions for the health of those in church or any gathering of people based on the best healthcare knowledge available.
- B. MASKS:** Face coverings should be worn inside churches and in other parish facilities. This is in keeping with the best knowledge available for the slowing down of the spread of the virus, and with the executive order of the governor. This is best expressed through announcements, signs and good example. It is not necessary nor is it encouraged to be confrontational with those who refuse to wear one. Personal safety by keeping a safe social distance is still the best approach to reducing the spread.
- C. DISPENSATION:** The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation has been extended indefinitely. This is in keeping with the rest of the Ohio Catholic Conference, and should be communicated to your parishioners. Those who are feeling well and who are not in the high risk categories should be encouraged to come to Mass. Those who are in the high risk categories, or who are not feeling well are encouraged to remain home.
- D. SINGING:** Singing and handling of missalettes and hymnals has been discouraged. While we are still maintaining caution, some singing should be permitted at Sunday Mass. Preference at this time should be given to the ordinary parts of the Mass that are known by heart. It may be possible to print a worship aid or to use some verses of familiar hymns. A cantor can assist with the singing at Mass. Masks should be worn by the congregation.

- E. PROCESSIONS:** Long processions including the offertory procession are still discouraged. Use discretion greeting parishioners while observing social distancing and the wearing of masks either before or after Mass.
- F. SIGN OF PEACE:** The sign of peace should still be omitted.
- G. DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION:** Latitude was given for distributing Holy Communion at the end of Mass. Communion should now be given at the normal time during Mass. Masks are to be worn by the ministers of Holy Communion. Latex gloves are never to be worn by either the minister or the communicant receiving in the hand. If parishes have been distributing Communion in a drive-by service or assembly line type formation to parishioners who have watched Mass online or on television, this practice should now be discontinued giving way to receiving Communion at the normal time within Mass. For those who are in the high risk categories, priests and deacons at some parishes have met individually with families to pray with them and to be able to distribute Communion to them. This is a favorable solution for those who are still unable to come to Mass.
- H. COMMUNION TO THE HOMEBOUND:** Communion can once again reasonably and safely be taken to homebound parishioners by priests, deacons, and commissioned extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion while taking the proper precautions of using hand sanitizer, masks and making the visit relatively brief while indoors. In all cases ministers are to use the pyx and the Rite for Communion to the Sick or Homebound.
- I. ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT:** Churches should be kept open during the hours when they normally would have been before the pandemic. This will allow people to adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the presence of the tabernacle. Returning holy hours with exposition back in the parish schedule should be done where it is possible to maintain social distancing. Parishioners should be encouraged to bring and use their own hand sanitizer. Pew sanitizing should still be done after weekend Masses as has been the policy. Since perpetual adoration requires at least one person to be present at all times, it might not be possible to return to this devotion at this time of the reopening. Furthermore, many adorers who make perpetual adoration possible in parishes are in that high risk category. Therefore, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle or during specific times of exposition should be the focus during this part of the return.
- J. RECONCILIATION AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK:** The sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick should be offered where possible with the greatest degree of accessibility possible, again in keeping with the healthcare guidelines.

- K. CONFIRMATION:** Many Confirmation Masses were delayed during this time. For those Confirmations that were scheduled and postponed, pastors will be delegated the faculty to confirm. This must be carried out in small groups and adhering to the healthcare guidelines. This delegation and additional liturgical aids will be forthcoming.
- L. MARRIAGES AND FUNERALS:** Marriages and funerals can be held according to the standard health guidelines which can be found at the Center for Disease Control website link here: [CLERGY FILES COVID-19 RESPONSE](#). [REDACTED]
- M. VOTIVE MASSES:** When possible during the week, the Votive Mass for the Sick, Our Lady Health of the Sick, or the special Mass in Time of Pandemic (link: <https://columbuscatholic.org/covid-19-liturgical-resources>) can be used.

II. PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS AND HIGH SCHOOLS

We are committed to opening our Catholic schools for in person classes. This may be possible in some areas of the diocese and not in others. There may be a need to close one school if there is a positive case in the building with the faculty, staff and students quarantining. This would not mean that all the schools in the diocese would need to close. Please refer to this link for the extensive planning documents from the Office of Catholic Schools for more information about their three tiered plan for reopening schools:

<https://education.columbuscatholic.org/resources-during-covid-19-pandemic>

III. PARISH SCHOOL OF RELIGION (PSR)

While the Catholic schools are planning for an in-person return for the year, it is advisable and recommended that PSR return in a virtual, hybrid or family oriented format. This would be the case even in those parishes that do not have a school, and only have PSR classrooms. The reason behind this recommendation is that children in school are now part of that particular group in their classroom, presuming they are maintaining distance from others outside of school and their immediate family. The issue with gathering for PSR is that the children are coming to the classroom from many different areas into a new group for only about an hour a week. The virtual format would be all remote learning using available technology, take-home packets and other resources. A hybrid format would be one in which the students meet monthly.

If monthly in-person classes are to occur, a few guidelines must be observed. Until further notice, in-person gatherings and ministry must include the wearing of masks of all present (except for speakers), safe social distancing (6 feet apart), rooms must be sanitized in between usage, and the practice of good health hygiene, including handwashing/sanitizing, coughing/sneezing into your elbow, etc. This will require restructuring many parish spaces and also the ordering of supplies. Furthermore, those attending ministry events at the parish must sign the diocesan COVID-19 waiver. It is advised to avoid using volunteers or staff who may be

vulnerable to COVID-19 for in-person ministry. Parishioners will need to be reminded to stay home if they manifest symptoms.

Additionally, pastors and staff should consider other protocols. Restrooms will need to be sanitized. Food should not be shared. If food is brought it should be prepackaged, only for individual use, or served by a professional staff or caterer. Detailed attendance should be taken of such events in case of the need for contact tracing. Catechists and volunteers will need to be trained in proper procedures. Sharing of materials (texts and handouts) should be avoided. Overnight events and field trips such as retreats should take place in a way that supports the same standard of care observed in the parish. As in the case with the return to public Masses, pastors and parishes are encouraged to develop their own particular protocols for enabling a safe return to in-person ministry in the fall.

IV. FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP WORKSHOPS

The online roundtable discussion entitled Parish School of Religion: Challenges and Opportunities in Fall 2020 hosted by Franciscan University in Steubenville on August 4 was a great success with 90 participants. That workshop is recorded and can be found here: [PSR Challenges and Opportunities Fall 2020](#). The audio begins at about the 20-minute mark.

The August 11 online roundtable discussion on Sacramental Preparation with 53 participants was another great success. You'll find the link to the recording here: [August 11 - Franciscan University - Sacramental Preparation](#). The presentation begins at about the 6:30 mark.

More of these workshop opportunities on other important topics are available from our partnership with Franciscan University and will be useful to you and your staff for planning and preparation. These will also be recorded for your viewing at a later time.

Tuesday, August 18	2:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Youth Ministry: Challenges and Opportunities in Fall 2020	<i>Dr. Eric Westby and Dr. Bob Rice</i>	Exploring alternatives to traditional youth ministry, particularly in the absence of in-person formation, meetings, and gatherings due to COVID restrictions (or weather-related cancellations). https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84825718329
Wednesday, August 26	2:00 – 3:30 p.m.	RCIA: Challenges and Opportunities in Fall 2020	Prof. Scott Sollom and Fr. Drake McCalister	Exploring alternatives to traditionally formatted RCIA programs, particularly in the absence of in-person gatherings, including models and practices of invitation, formation, and completion. https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83052627128