



OFFICE OF EVANGELIZATION & CATECHESIS

Diocese of Austin

June 3, 2020

Parish Directors of Religious Education,

The suspension of public masses, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, included many first communion celebrations throughout the diocese. In some cases, first reconciliation services were missed as well.

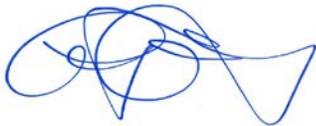
It is possible that the pandemic will be with us for some time, as no vaccine is forthcoming in the short-term. The resumption of public liturgies offers the opportunity to minister to God's people while guarding their safety. For this reason, the celebrations of first communion will look different than in the past. The following temporary protocols are provided for celebrating first communions:

- The decision of when to celebrate first communion is proper to the pastor.
- The expectation is that children are to have made their first reconciliation prior to the celebration of first communion.
 - Please make the necessary adaptations to maintain the same protocols for Reconciliation as are employed for the Mass.
- Parishes should evaluate whether adequate formation for the sacraments was provided during the 2019-2020 catechetical year, either in the classroom or in the home. This assessment may include contacting the family of each first communicant. If it is determined that the student is ready, he or she may be scheduled to receive first communion at a Mass during the week or at a Sunday Mass. It is important to note that Sacramental Theology holds that a minimal understanding of the Sacrament is the requirement to receive the Sacrament.
- Families who are not comfortable attending Mass may be given the option to delay and should be contacted in the future. Their decision to postpone the sacrament should be respected. Parishes with several families choosing to wait may schedule a later first communion date to accommodate them.
- The liturgies should follow the *Temporary COVID-19 Protocols for the Celebration of the Sacraments for the Diocese of Austin* issued by the Vicar General to the parishes in conjunction with the bishop's decree, last dated May 5, 2020. Parishes may assign first communicants to weekday and Sunday Masses in smaller numbers, spreading the first communions over several weeks.

- Pictures may be taken by one photographer from the side. Pictures will not be taken with the celebrant after the Mass.
- Note regarding the baptized and un-catechized: In many parishes, baptized children who began faith formation after their seventh birthday are being prepared for both first communion and confirmation. Under normal circumstances these sacraments would be received at the same liturgy. This year, parish confirmations scheduled on weekdays or Saturday before 4pm will be celebrated in the context of a Liturgy of the Word service. Therefore, these students should receive their first communion at a parish weekday or Sunday Mass as soon as possible following their confirmation.

Some families may express disappointment at the need to follow to these protocols, but it is important in this time of pandemic to exercise prudence in providing the sacraments and protecting the faithful. My sincere gratitude to pastors and their staffs for working tirelessly to serve the faithful entrusted to them.

Sincerely in Christ,



Gustavo Rodriguez
Director of Evangelization and Catechesis
Diocese of Austin