

## SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR REOPENING OF PUBLIC MASSES

As people of faith, we must always keep aware of the importance of acting in a socially responsible way, in order to give good example to others and to witness the special concern we are called to have to act with charity toward all. As we start to open up for public Masses here in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, then, we must necessarily begin by allowing only a limited number of attendants at each Mass (see each county links) in order to ensure compliance with social distancing guidelines and other safety protocols, and so continue cooperating with the efforts of our public officials to stem the spread of the coronavirus. The following directives will help to ensure that we are acting in a socially responsible way, while enabling us to carry out our supreme call and duty to worship God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If we all continue to do our part in this effort, we will be able to take further steps, gradually, toward returning to ordinary parish life. The Archdiocese will continue to issue directives to guide parish events, group meetings and other such activities as we progress, step by step, toward this goal.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. All the faithful in the Archdiocese of San Francisco are dispensed from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass. Although the faithful are dispensed from their obligation to attend Mass, they must observe the Lord's Day and are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday (such as following a livestream Mass or participating in a spiritual or corporal act of mercy). This also applies to Holy Days of Obligation.
2. Those who are at higher risk of COVID-19 (e.g., those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) are to continue staying at home. Likewise, anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling ill, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies. As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible.
3. A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public Masses or administering sacraments. The same holds for other ministers who might serve at a Mass (deacon, servers, lectors) as well as for sacristans, ushers, etc.
4. Parishes should continue to livestream Masses if feasible or direct parishioners to the Archdiocesan website for a listing of livestream links. A conference call system can also be used to accommodate those parishioners that do not have internet service.
5. Parishes are not to hold events before or after Masses until directed by the Archdiocese.
6. Each parish is to provide clear means of communication to its parishioners (e.g., bulletin, website, social media, Flocknote and general announcements).
7. Ushers are critical for the social distancing to work. Parishioners are to follow all directions of ushers before and during Mass. Ushers should show parishioners to their pew.

8. As guidelines from the California Department of Public Health and the parishes' local county department of health guidelines are updated, Pastors or Administrators are asked to make amendments to procedures accordingly.

### ARRANGEMENT AND PROCEDURES FOR THE WORSHIP SPACE

1. In charity to all and in consideration of public health and safety, those attending Mass must wear a mask that covers the nose and the mouth. All faithful able to do so are asked to bring their own hand sanitizer and mask. Churches will provide a limited supply of masks and hand sanitizer as that is possible for them.
2. Pews and other high-touch areas such as doorknobs are to be sanitized after every Mass. Each parish is to identify an established volunteer core to assist in the sanitizing of the church after each Mass. See the link for CDC cleaning guidelines.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>
3. Signage at entrances to the church should be posted alerting people to the safety protocols to be observed.
4. Liturgical ministers do not wear masks while they are carrying out their role at Mass.
5. The six-foot distance rule must be strictly enforced. Each church should pre-stage distanced pews in accordance with the social distancing guidelines.
  - Cordon off pews to ensure a minimum of six feet between pews in which people will be sitting. Brightly colored and discernible tape or rope should be used.
  - Ushers should serve as monitors.
  - Place tape on the floor to ensure distance in the Communion line.
  - Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row.
6. Scheduling of Mass – all Masses held inside of church should be kept short, not to exceed 45 minutes in duration. Masses can also be held in an alternative site such as a parish hall, in which case the Mass times should be staggered in order to avoid outdoor crowding when people arrive and leave (e.g., in the church, Masses are every hour on the hour, and in the hall, every hour on the first quarter hour). Alternative sites must comply with the same guidelines. The scheduling of Masses will be left to the discretion of the Pastor. In anticipation of people arriving for one Mass while those at the previous Mass are still leaving the church, separate designated ports of ingress and egress should be used in order to avoid crowding.
7. Music should be provided limited to the time necessary to cover a liturgical action (e.g., entrance chant up to moment ministers arrive at their places in the sanctuary, during the preparation of the altar only for the time the altar is being prepared and not beyond, etc.).
8. Given the reduced number of people at Mass due to the social distancing guidelines, a system will have to be implemented to limit the number of persons attending any given Mass in accordance with state and county health guidelines. Methods such as Eventbrite or reservations can be helpful in this regard. Ushers and other volunteers will assist in ensuring that no more than the number permissible will attend each Mass. Provisions should be made to accommodate overflow in other buildings.

9. For some parishes, it is also possible to have Mass outdoors. This is to be preferred if it can be arranged in a dignified way while maintaining the required social distancing, as outdoor space minimizes sustained exposure to the virus.
10. Parishes will have to develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other. It is advisable to have ushers placed at the restrooms to monitor compliance with these regulations. Restrooms will need to be regularly sanitized by properly-trained parish staff.
11. Consider keeping the church or building doors open to prevent the touching of common surfaces and to maximize the circulation of fresh air.
12. Holy water stoups should be empty (holy water may be made available from a closed container).
13. If possible, Mass attendants and visitors to the church should be screened for temperature and/or symptoms, and asked to use hand sanitizer.
14. Mass attendants are asked to complete the *Archdiocesan Informed Consent Form*. Parishes are encouraged to use an online form and tracking of this form. If live signatures are collected, attention should be used to implement sanitizing between use should pens be shared.
15. Parishes are also to keep a list of all attendants at each Mass with their corresponding contact information and keep the list for 45 days, to assist with contact tracing should it become necessary.
16. An initial announcement should be made communicating the temporary liturgical alterations (e.g., no handshake at the Sign of Peace, and the changes in the distribution of Holy Communion).

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONDUCTING MASS

1. All liturgical aids (e.g., song books, missalettes, worship aids, etc.) are to be removed from the church and kept in storage prior to the commencement of public Masses.
2. To the extent possible, the liturgical ministers (deacon, servers, lectors) should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other. This includes any time they may be together in the sacristy before or after Mass.
3. All ministers must sanitize their hands before processing out to begin the Mass.
4. The priest and other ministers should enter the sanctuary from the sacristy.
5. The priest will place the Missal on a stand at the chair or on the altar when he recites the presidential prayers, rather than having a server hold the Roman Missal.
6. The offertory procession (bringing up the offerings) should be omitted.
7. The collection or offering baskets should be placed in strategic locations before Mass begins. This mitigates the congregation leaving the pews during Mass and minimizes exposure. Those handling money, checks and envelopes must wear protective sanitation gloves and wash their hands after touching these items.
8. Disinfect microphones, ambo, podiums between each use. Consult equipment manufacturers to determine appropriate disinfection steps.

9. A deacon (if present) or a server brings the Missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair. Alternatively, the vessels may be kept on the right side of the altar or on a credence table next to it before Mass begins (GIRM, n. 255 – which would be particularly indicated if there is no deacon or if the priest carries out the introductory and concluding rites from the altar instead of the chair). The deacon then, if present, arranges the items on the altar and prepares the chalice in the usual way; otherwise, this is done by the priest.
10. The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance, either at a credence table near the altar or at the side of the altar itself. The lavabo bowl should have water in it already, with the towel next to it. After he performs the lavabo, the priest should then sanitize his hands. The lavabo items should remain on the credence table and be removed by the priest after the Mass.
11. The hosts to be consecrated for the Communion of the faithful are to be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic Prayer.
12. For the elevation of the sacred species at “Through him, and with him, and in him,” if a deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is brief, he need not remain 6 feet from the priest while doing so.
13. The faithful exchange the sign of peace by remaining in their places and reverently bowing to each other.

### THE DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

With a larger number of participants at a Mass indoors, the distribution may take place immediately after the conclusion of Mass, i.e., immediately after the dismissal, with no recessional song being sung. This would allow for minimizing the time that the people are in church all together, in that after each communicant takes a few minutes to pray after receiving Communion, the communicant can then leave the church before the others have received. Also, while receiving Communion in the hand may be encouraged, no one is to be denied Communion who wishes to receive on the tongue.

With either option for distributing Communion, the following regulations are to be followed.

1. A small table should be placed at each Communion station, with an unfolded corporal, a bottle of hand sanitizer that is unscented, and an ablution bowl and purificator.
2. The Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the faithful. A concelebrating priest should either have his own chalice and purificator (which he himself purifies) or may self-communicate by intinction before the principal celebrant communicates himself from the chalice.
3. After communicating himself, the priest purifies the chalice and paten and his fingers, and then sanitizes his hands (Holy Communion may not be given with gloves on). He then dons a surgical mask or cloth face covering and gives Communion to the liturgical ministers, and to the members of the assembly (if Communion is to be distributed at the

usual time). Any additional ministers assisting with the distribution of Communion should sanitize their hands and don a face covering when the priest does.

4. The faithful should remove their face coverings before coming forward for Holy Communion, as well as gloves if they are wearing them and wish to receive Communion in the hand. Consider the help of an usher (wearing a mask) to assist the faithful to come forward pew by pew, to remind the faithful to maintain 6 feet distance and that they are to remove gloves and mask before coming forward for Holy Communion. Immediately upon receiving Holy Communion, the faithful should resume the proper use of their face coverings.
5. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person's hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, cleanse his fingers in the ablution bowl and dry them on the purificator, and then use hand sanitizer (non-scented). The same holds true for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion as well as deacons who are distributing Communion. The water in the ablution bowl should then be poured down the sacarium (or, lacking one, poured into the ground in a place away from where people are likely to walk). He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.
6. After the sacred vessels are purified, they should be washed after each Mass with hot water and soap.
7. All sacred linens that are to be cleaned must be placed in a plastic bag.

If Communion will be distributed after Mass, then in addition to the above, the following steps are to be observed.

1. At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass (e.g., before Communion or after the Lamb of God), the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the conclusion of the Mass. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
2. After giving Communion to the liturgical ministers, the priest leaves the ciborium/ciboria on the altar, covered, on top of a corporal.
3. After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest (and deacon, if present) remain in the sanctuary, while the other liturgical ministers return to the sacristy. At this point the priest again sanitizes his hands, as do any others who will assist in the distribution of Holy Communion.
4. At the altar, the priest holds up a single host and says, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." He then leads the people in saying: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed." The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion) then dons a surgical mask or cloth face covering, takes the ciborium, and goes to the Communion station.
5. At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle as usual. The faithful may depart after making a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR OUTDOOR MASSES

As we approach pleasant weather, outdoor Masses are a good option. This will alleviate the necessity to sanitize a larger church space and serve as a viable alternative to smaller space.

1. Care needs to be taken so that the sacred elements are protected from the weather.
2. The same precautions and guidelines for indoor Masses should be followed.
3. Cars should be parked in one area and the Mass should be celebrated in a different area.
4. The faithful are encouraged to bring their own seating to relieve the parish from the burden of sanitizing seating. The seating arrangement is to be clearly marked and allow for proper distancing.
5. The same guidelines for restroom access and sanitization as indoor Masses apply.
6. Distribution of Holy Communion would follow the guidelines for indoor Mass. There is to be no distribution of Holy Communion to congregants in their vehicle.

## ADDENDUM –December 18, 2020

Singing is particularly risky in an indoor space, and it should only be done by a cantor or two (no congregational singing). For singing to happen, the cantor(s) must be in a separate, isolated area from the nave of the church where the people are assembled, or otherwise, at a minimum, at least twelve feet away from the person closest to them and wearing a face covering.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

California Department of Public Health link

<https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>

San Francisco Department of Public Health link

<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/covid-guidance/Gatherings-Tips-Faith-Practitioners.pdf>

Marin County Public Health link

<https://marinrecovers.com/faith-based-organizations/>

San Mateo County Public Health link

<https://www.smchealth.org/coronavirus-health-officer-updates>

Clergy resources in each of the three counties:

Marin County: Rev. Andrew Spyrow

San Francisco: Rev. Arturo Albano and Rev. Moises Agudo

San Mateo: Rev. Thomas V. Martin