

Diocese of San Angelo
COVID-19 Gathering Protocols
September 3, 2020

These protocols relate to the use of church facilities for gatherings such as receptions, family reunions, funeral meals, showers, choir practices, meetings of parish organizations, parish festivals, etc.

1. Civil regulations:

Please follow state, county, and city regulations about gatherings.

2. If a gathering cannot maintain the safety requirements in this document, it may not take place. The person in charge of the facility (parish pastor, school principal, agency director) ultimately determines the practicability of any event in that facility.

Monitoring of these protocols is to be carried out by staff or volunteers.

3. Room capacity:

- a. When facilities are used for gatherings, groups may not exceed 50% of the normal occupancy capacity for the room being used. Normal occupancy capacity of a room is determined in accordance with the latest revision of the International Fire Code as adopted by the State of Texas and the respective local government.

- b. For ease and consistency, a standard method to calculate the temporary COVID-19 occupancy of a room is to take the number of net square feet [total square footage of room minus the square footage of unusable space (ex: stage, cabinets, etc.)] of usable space in the room, and divide it by 36. This should give you a safe and conservative occupancy number that provides a 6-foot distance between people.

- c. Keep in mind that 6-foot social distancing must be maintained, so that, in reality, the temporary COVID-19 occupancy limit may be a much lower percentage. In the event that the 50% limit conflicts with the social distancing guidelines, the social distancing guidelines will prevail.

- d. Staff and volunteers assisting in these gatherings are counted toward the occupancy limitation.

- e. It is recommended that organizers implement online signup lists, tickets, or a call-in system to account for individuals who plan to attend the gathering.

- f. Doors should be monitored to assure that the crowd does not exceed the maximum number of people allowed, keeping in mind the social distance requirement of 6 feet between parties.

4. Outdoor Gatherings:

- a. Any outdoor social gathering in excess of 10 people (other than religious worship services, child care services, youth camps, summer camps, or recreational sports programs) is prohibited by the state unless the mayor of the city in which the gathering is held, or the county judge in the case of a gathering in an unincorporated area, approves the gathering. Such approval can be made subject to certain civil conditions or restrictions.
- b. Gatherings for worship, religious education instruction, and youth ministry faith development may be provided outdoors in groups larger than 10 people with the permission of the pastor. These sessions must observe the above requirements for face masks, social distancing, hand washing, etc.

5. Social distancing:

- a. Parties must maintain at least 6 feet of distance apart from other parties at all times, including while waiting to be seated at the reception.
- b. There should be no tables of more than 10 people, keeping in mind that 6 ft. distancing must be maintained between people not from the same household, and tables should be spaced 6 feet apart.
- c. Dancing is not allowed.

6. Attendees:

- a. The following persons are encouraged to stay home:
 - 1) those who are age 65 or older;
 - 2) those who have serious underlying medical conditions;
 - 3) those who are feeling sick or who have a cough of any sort;
 - 4) Even more urgently, anyone who has any reason to believe they might have been exposed to COVID-19 should remain at home.
- b. Face coverings:
 - 1) Unless medically waived, all present over the age of 2 are required to wear a face covering over the nose and mouth (disposable/reusable mask, neck gaiter, or bandana) except when eating, drinking, or doing aerobic physical activity, or when outside and at least six feet from others.

- 2) Messages or images on the face coverings must not be contrary to Catholic faith and morals.
- 3) Face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.
- 4) According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the coronavirus is spread mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets. The face coverings act as a barrier to prevent the droplets from traveling. This is called “source control”.
- 5) There is not enough evidence to support the effectiveness of face shields for “source control”. Therefore, the CDC does not recommend the use of face shields as a substitute for face masks. However, full-face shields may be used in place of a mask to protect eyes, nose, and mouth whenever a mask is not feasible. Face masks might not always be feasible with younger children, people with asthma or other breathing difficulties, those with medical or emotional conditions, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or whenever the educational context may benefit from the ability to see an individual’s full face. In those cases, face shields may be allowed.
- 6) All clergy staff, contractors, and volunteers are to wear face masks or cloth face coverings while participating in these group gatherings, whether indoors or outdoors.
- 7) According to state regulations, any person driving or riding in a vehicle with others who are not part of the same household must wear a face mask or cloth face covering in the vehicle.

7. Health protocols for clergy, staff, contractors, and volunteers:

- a. All clergy, staff, contractors, and those volunteers assisting in these gatherings must be trained on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- b. All clergy, staff, contractors, and those volunteers assisting in these gatherings are to be screened upon arrival. Their temperature is to be checked with the use of a medical-type non-contact infrared thermometer. They are to be sent home if they have any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19:
 - 1) Cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste, loss of smell, diarrhea, feeling feverish, having a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit, or known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19.

- 2) They are not to be allowed to return until they have met the criteria in the health protocols of the document from the State of Texas on Minimum Standard Health Protocols. These are as follows:

“Do not allow employees or volunteers with new or worsening signs or symptoms listed above to return to work until:

- a) In the case of an employee or volunteer who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met: at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications); and the individual has improvement in symptoms (for example, cough, shortness of breath); and at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared; or
- b) In the case of an employee or volunteer who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and does not get evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, the individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to work until the individual has completed the same three-step criteria listed above; or
- c) If the employee or volunteer has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period, the individual must obtain a medical professional’s note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis.

Do not allow an employee or volunteer with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure (with an exception granted for healthcare workers and critical infrastructure workers).”

- 3) Clergy, staff, contractors, and volunteers are to wash or sanitize their hands upon arrival and upon departure.

8. Health protocols for the facilities where gatherings are held:

- a. Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees, including regularly touched surfaces, such as doors, tables, chairs, restrooms, and showers. The Centers for Disease Control website has very helpful information about cleaning and disinfecting.
- b. Disinfect tables and chairs between events. Be careful not to use cleaning or disinfecting products that damage the finish.

- c. Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available to staff, contractors, volunteers, and attendees. Encourage those entering or exiting to perform hand hygiene.
- d. Make hand sanitizer available to attendees near all entry points of the facility.
- e. Signs:
 - 1) Have readily available signage to remind everyone of the best hygiene practices, including at least the following items: hand washing, face covering, respiratory etiquette, refraining from shaking hands, and social distancing.

2) Signs are to be posted in each classroom or meeting room of the parish, stating the temporary COVID-19 occupancy limit. For example, an appropriate sign would say this:

Temporary COVID-19
Occupancy Limit: ___ persons
6-foot distancing prevails

- f. Ventilation: When possible, the circulation of outside air into the room should be increased.
- g. Outdoor areas generally require normal routine cleaning, but do not require disinfection.

9. Food:

- a. If food is served, it is strongly suggested that it be pre-packaged in individual servings.
- b. Family-style meals or self-serve buffets are not allowed.
- c. If food is provided for attendees, it is to be served by trained staff, contractors, or volunteers.
- d. If attendees bring food to share, it must be brought in containers that can be sanitized, and the containers must be sanitized upon arrival.
- e. Guests should not share things touched by others, such as common serving utensils.
- f. Condiments, silverware, flatware, glassware, or other traditional table-top items are not to be left on unoccupied tables.
- g. Condiments should be provided only upon request, and in single-use, non-reusable portions.

- h. Dining areas must be cleaned and disinfected after each group of attendees departs. This includes the disinfecting of tables, chairs, stalls, and countertops.

10. Overnight stays:

Overnight stays where groups sleep in the same room are not allowed at this time; however, exceptions can be made for members of the same household.

11. Multiple-day events:

Check the temperature of all attendees at the beginning of each day.

12. Retreats and days of recollection:

No activities involving physical contact between persons are to be included.

13. Factors to consider:

In deciding whether or not to allow a particular gathering, leaders should take into account the number of people, the size of the room, the amount of airflow, and the duration of interaction in that room.