

DIOCESE OF OGDENSBURG

REVISED GUIDELINES FOR PARISH LIFE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Updated: May 6, 2021

Guidelines for the Celebration of Mass

- The general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will remain in effect at this time. Although the State has eliminated limitations on capacity for our churches, the requirement of six-foot physical distancing constitutes a *de facto* limit on capacity that makes it imprudent to lift the dispensation at this time.
- **Wearing a mask during Mass is still required, as is maintaining a social distance of six feet between persons who are not from the same household or bubble. All are asked to wear their masks throughout Mass, especially when entering or leaving Mass or when they are moving about. However, it is possible for parishioners to lower their masks while they are seated in their pews, provided they observe physical distancing.**
- **The building capacity limit of 50% is eliminated, and the number of participants at Mass is limited only by the need to physically distance six feet from those who are not from the same household or bubble.**
- It is no longer necessary to block off every other row of pews. Parishioners may be seated in a staggered fashion while respecting six feet of distance.
- No distinction should be made according to one's vaccination status or COVID test results.
- Deacons, lectors, servers, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may resume their duties in the celebration of Mass. In the case of servers, this may not necessarily include all their former responsibilities, but parishes are strongly encouraged to bring servers back.
- A cantor is permitted, and small choirs may resume. Mask should be worn by choir members and by parishioners when singing.
- Weekday Masses should continue in the main church, rather than in a chapel.
- Ministers of hospitality (greeters) and ushers may resume their duties but should not make physical contact with parishioners.
- Priests, deacons, lectors, servers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, ushers and sacristans are to continue to follow prescribed handwashing and sanitizing practices.
- Offertory collections with baskets may be resumed by ushers, provided they do not make physical contact with parishioners.

- It continues to be necessary to avoid physical contact during the Sign of Peace. The Sign of Peace is optional and there should be no hand holding during the Lord's Prayer.
- Communion should be distributed in the traditional manner and at the normal time, with parishioners being responsible for maintaining social distancing from those not in their household or bubble during the procession. Communion, no matter how received, should be administered at the regular time and not at the conclusion of Mass.
- At this time, the Precious Blood should not be distributed to the faithful.

Guidelines for the Church Building and Liturgical Objects

- Because it has been demonstrated that the danger of contracting COVID from surfaces is less than previously thought, parishes should focus on sanitizing bathrooms and other high traffic or high touch areas (e.g. light switches and door knobs) rather than trying to sanitize the entire church after each Mass. Each church should be sanitized and cleaned daily.
- All Communion vessels should be properly cleansed after Mass with hot, soapy water after being purified according to the rubrics.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances and in the Sanctuary where it can easily be used by celebrants, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and others serving or attending Mass.
- Holy Water fonts (stoups) should remain empty at this time. Baptismal fonts should remain empty when not celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism.
- Parishes may use worship aids (e.g. missalettes), provided all participants sanitize their hands at they enter the church.
- Bulletins may be distributed at Mass and may also be distributed electronically.

Sacramental and Parish Life

- Weddings and funerals should be held.
- Baptism should continue. Clean water must be used for each individual Baptism.
- Parishes should hold regular Confessions. If confessionals have insufficient space or ventilation, another location in the Church may be used, respecting both privacy and social distancing requirements.
- Anointing of the Sick should be done with utmost care, following the protocols specified on the Thomistic Institute website.
- Visits to the homebound for Communion should resume with proper caution. Further, visits to parishioners and nursing homes should resume, respecting the protocols in place in those institutions.

- Churches should be open for visitation, and Eucharistic Adoration may resume, using appropriate precautions and observing social distancing.
- Parish group activities may resume, including Bible studies, prayer groups, pastoral council meetings, finance council meetings, following appropriate protocols.
- Faith Formation classes should continue following the established protocols.
- Volunteers are encouraged to resume serving in parishes.
- All parish offices should continue to follow the protocols in place and resume normal business hours.