

Back in His Presence
The Diocese of Rockford's plan for the return to public Mass and worship

Date May 15, 2020

Please read the following very carefully and ensure that each and every procedure is executed in your parish(es).

The obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days will continue to be suspended until further notice. As far as possible, depending on the capability of a parish, live-stream Masses should continue for the benefit of parishioners who will remain at home.

Masses in parishes may resume, with reduced capacity; namely, for groups of 10 or less in the Church at any time, exclusive of the celebrant and ministers, beginning on Monday, May 25, 2020. The following restrictions must be in place at the parish before public Mass is allowed to resume. When these requirements are met at the parish, the determination of the date when to allow for resuming public Masses rests with the Bishop.

Upon successful completion of all preparations and safety measures, the pastor is to fill out an online Pre-Open Checklist to verify compliance and to seek authorization to resume public Mass. The link for that checklist will be sent to you in the coming days along with information about a webinar prepared by the Chicago Province offered for leaders of your parish volunteers. In the meantime, a list of TRAINING PROCEDURES FOR VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR CHURCH SERVICES which has been adapted to the needs of the Diocese of Rockford is also attached for parishes to begin their preparations.

It is recommended that if possible Masses be scheduled with greater frequency. Attendance could be first-come first-served, or allocated by some other system (a rotation system based on the first letter of last names, an online ticketing system like Eventbrite, etc.) to be determined on the parish level. As far as possible, the list of those who have made reservations or otherwise arranged to attend Mass is to be retained.

Directives:

- Inform the faithful that anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to church for any reason. A notice on the church doors is an appropriate way to communicate this.
- Persons 65 years and older should be encouraged to stay at home for the time being.
- Hand sanitizer should be placed near the entrance of the Church. Encourage those entering and exiting to use it.
- Only one door should be used as the entrance into the Church. If possible, keep social distancing and use various exit doors to limit the density of departing faithful.
- The entrance door and exit doors should be propped open to minimize contact with door handles.
- The faithful present at Mass must wear a mask. Consider providing masks to those who have come without one. The priest must wear a mask during the liturgy as well. He may take it off during the homily. He should keep a safe distance of 6 feet away from all persons. All deacons and volunteers are to wear masks.

- Priests and hospitality ministers are not to gather and greet before and after Mass. You may wish to inform the faithful that you will not be able to greet them before and after Mass.
- Social distancing of 6 feet must be maintained and managed with the assistance of parish staff and/or volunteers:
 - When entering and leaving the Church
 - With seating — between non-family members
 - During the Communion procession
 - Provisions need to be made in advance to ensure social distancing at all times; ropes, ribbon, tape, floor markings, etc. should be used.
 - Members of a single household who arrive together do not need to practice social distancing and may sit together.
 - Seating should begin at the front of the Church as people arrive to keep distancing and good order.
 - Consider marking off pews so parishioners can only sit every third pew or so to ensure social distancing.
- Ministers, e.g., priests, deacons, lectors, etc., should be reminded to practice social distancing at all times. Sacristans are to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water and wear masks and gloves as they prepare the vessels before Mass. The vessels must be washed thoroughly with soap and water before and after each liturgy (except those vessels in the tabernacle).
- Servers are not to be used. The celebrant might make use of a stand at the chair or place the Roman Missal on the altar.
- Maintain a proper distance in the sacristy and during the entrance and recessional processions. If necessary given the configuration of a church, consider modifying the route of the procession to ensure social distancing.
- All vessels containing the bread and wine are to remain covered until placed on the altar.
- A separate chalice and paten should be used for every priest or deacon on the altar.
- The invitation to the Sign of Peace is to be omitted, and no sign of peace offered.
- There is to be no holding hands at the Our Father
- There is not to be a procession of the offertory gifts of bread and wine. They will be brought to the altar from a credence table in the sanctuary.
- The priest celebrant must prepare his own chalice and perform the lavabo washing by himself without the assistance of another minister.
- If Hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could 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.
- 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.
- Priests may wish to remind the faithful that they are not required to receive Communion. They may make a spiritual Communion.
- Only priests and deacons may distribute Holy Communion. Holy Communion must be distributed. It may not be placed on a paten or in a ciborium for the faithful to take it themselves.

- The reception of Holy Communion may take place only in the hand.
- Tongs or other tools are not to be used for the distribution of Communion.
- The Precious Blood is not to be offered until further notice.
- In the Communion line, people are to come up in single file line, maintaining a distance of six feet from the person in front of them. It is recommended that tape be placed on the floor to demonstrate where to stand in line. Where in the past, two or more Communion lines have formed in a single aisle, that should be eliminated.
- If inadvertent contact is made while distributing Communion, the priest or deacon is to stop, sanitize his hands again, and continue with the distribution of Holy Communion. It is advisable to have a small table with the items for sanitizing nearby the Communion station.
- Baskets are not to be passed for the collection. They should be located in an accessible and suitable location.
- Offertory money should be placed in a tamper-evident bag, logged, and kept in the safe for at least three days before being counted. Counters are to wear masks and gloves when counting, and properly sanitize their hands before and after the counting.
- No social gatherings may take place before or after Mass, e.g., coffee and donuts, Children's liturgy of the word, etc.
- Ensure proper sanitizing of frequently touched surfaces in the Church, following CDC guidelines, and if possible, provide hand sanitizer at the Church entrance.
- Provisions are to be made for cleaning and sanitizing the Church following each Mass, including restrooms. Special attention should be given to the pews reserved for use and for commonly touched surfaces such as door handles. Cleaners should wear masks and gloves.
- Remove holy water from the holy water fonts.
- No sprinkling rite at the beginning of Mass.
- If possible, simple liturgical vestments should be used which can be regularly laundered, especially after weekend liturgies.
- Due to the airborne spread of the virus, there is to be only a cantor at Masses with music. Choirs are not permitted. There may also be an accompanist. The selection of well-known hymnody will aid the faithful in participating without the use of hymnals, etc.
- There should be no hymnals, missals, Bibles, prayer cards, etc., in the pews.
- No new screens or projectors are to be erected without the approval of the Diocesan Director of Worship.
- It is recommended that the congregation be dismissed by rows to avoid crowding at exits.
- Encourage the faithful to maintain social distancing on all areas of the parish campus, not just in the Church proper.
- 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 the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other.
- No paper bulletins should be distributed.
- Gathering area tables or any items which encourage congregating in usual narthex type areas should be put into storage.
- Educate staff and volunteers on the plan and their respective roles. Set the tone. Be positive and welcoming. At the same time educate them that their role might be to be firm in asking someone to return at another time to attend another liturgy because the current liturgy is at capacity. All staff and volunteers should know the appropriate procedures.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that, for those who desire to receive Holy Communion, they may do so at the appropriate moment, but that those who wish to remain in their places may do so. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The faithful should remove any face coverings before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves. Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed.
- The priest should perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing Holy Communion.

Additional Directives:

In a situation in which a priest might be particularly vulnerable, he may choose to celebrate Mass and allow another priest or deacon to distribute Communion. If a priest in active ministry is at a high risk of contracting the virus, he may contact Msgr. Steve Knox for assistance.

It is up to the pastor to ensure that social distancing is maintained and the maximum number of participants at Mass is strictly and faithfully observed.

Communion to the Sick or Homebound may only be brought by a priest or deacon. He should wash his hands before and after his visit and wear a mask for the duration of the visit.

Churches may remain open for public prayer. Pastors are to ensure that the maximum number of faithful allowed is observed. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the Church may be resumed provided the Blessed Sacrament is never left unattended and that the maximum of 10 people in church, exclusive of the celebrant and ministers, is strictly observed. Otherwise exposition must be discontinued for the time-being.

Public celebrations of the Sacraments are permitted as long as adequate spacing and social distancing are managed and maintained and the maximum number of 10 persons, exclusive of the celebrant and ministers, is strictly observed:

- Baptism of infants may be celebrated while keeping in mind the need for spacing. New water is to be used and blessed for each baptism. Baptisms of more than one person in a single ceremony may not take place.
- Weddings and Quinceañeras may be celebrated with the limitations stated above.
- Opportunity for Reconciliation should be maintained while assuring proper spacing and ensuring the penitent's confidentiality. After each confession the penitent's chair must be sanitized.
- Confessions should take place in the open air inside or outside the church building, i.e., not in a closed, small, confined confessional. The penitent's seat should be sanitized after each confession.
- Funerals may be celebrated with the limitations stated above.

- Anointing of the Sick is to be available not only in danger of death. Priests are asked to be courageous and generously respond to those who are in proximate danger of death and request anointing and viaticum. Please see Bishop Malloy's letter of March 25, 2020, regarding anointing procedures during the pandemic.

All priests are encouraged to provide reasonable and prudent measures to ensure everyone's safety, including their own. Everyone is encouraged to continue to practice good hygiene. People who feel sick should remain at home as should vulnerable and at-risk populations. Some of the most vulnerable and at risk persons will be those who want to attend Mass the most. Please make every reasonable effort, in all charity, to discourage them from placing themselves at risk.

Parish offices may now open at the discretion of the pastor while observing the restrictions on social distancing and number of persons. Employees must wear masks and be able to maintain a 6-foot distance from others. If your parish office has frequent visitors, maintain no more than 10 people at a time in the offices, and visitors are to wear masks.

Things to Consider:

- Ensure that your parish have enough cleaning supplies, masks and gloves.
- Develop a process for sanitizing between Masses that maintains social distancing.
- Determine the minimum number of people needed to sanitize pews and surfaces.
- Estimate how long it will take to properly sanitize between Masses and schedule Mass times accordingly. Consider spacing Masses further apart.
- There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass to contract the coronavirus.
- There is no pre-determined timeline for how long restrictions will be in place.

Communication:

- Communicate ahead of time with the entire parish. Give the people a preview of what social distancing or other precautions will be in place. Mail a letter from the pastor, send an e-mail blast, and/or post a video on the parish website or Facebook page.
- Especially let parishioners know the revised capacity of your church. For now, that number is 10. In the future, any revised number of people will be likely limited by space or civil decree. Advise them on any plans for tickets, online reservations, or ushers counting people at the doors.
- Parishioners may not be able to sit in their "usual spot" or capacity may be limited. Parking may be rearranged.
- Let parishioners know masks are required and hand-sanitizer will be available.
- Advertise any new Mass schedule or additional Masses

While the opportunity to return to at least some form of the celebration of the Eucharist, priest and people together, is a most happy occasion, it will certainly bring with it new challenges and frustrations. At this moment we strive for progress, not perfection. Thank you for your magnanimity, your fidelity to your priesthood and the people you serve in these difficult moments, and for carrying out these procedures with particular diligence and care.

Please direct any questions to Father Jonathan Bakkelund at reopen@rockforddiocese.org.