



To: All Priests and Deacons

From: Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley

Date: June 18, 2021

Re: Update and Clarification on NYS Lifting COVID-19 Restrictions

Dear Father and Deacon,

I am writing to communicate more particulars about the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions by the State of New York. All policies, guidelines and protocols issued between March 2020 and May 2021 relating to the celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the Sacraments during the Pandemic are hereby rescinded with the exception of those listed in the protocol update below.

COVID-19 PROTOCOL UPDATE

June 18, 2021

New York State announced that COVID-19 restrictions are lifted immediately because 70 percent of New Yorkers aged 18 or older have received at least one vaccination. The State health guidance and guidelines, including social gathering limits, capacity restrictions, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, wearing of face coverings for the vaccinated (including during the distribution of Holy Communion by the priest, deacon or Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist), health screening and contract tracing, are lifted and are now optional.

Unvaccinated individuals continue to be responsible for wearing masks under CDC directives. Additionally, health guidelines for large-scale indoor events (5,000 persons or more), pre-k to grade 12 schools, public transportation, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, nursing homes and health care settings remain in effect per CDC guidelines.

Health and Obligation to Attend Mass:

I lifted the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass on the Feast of Corpus Christi, June 6, 2021. However, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass does not apply to individuals who are sick, in a vulnerable category (elderly, individuals with weakened immune systems, people with long term conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart conditions, respiratory conditions and the like), those who continue to have significant anxiety or concerns about returning to Mass in person. I request that the streaming of Sunday Eucharistic celebrations be maintained for the benefit of those who are still not in a position to attend Mass in person.

Celebration of the Eucharist

The Instructions of the Universal Church and our Diocese for the worthy and reverent celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacraments are to be followed, with the following exceptions:

- The distribution of Holy Communion will continue to be under one form, namely the Sacred Host. Continue to encourage reception of Communion in the hand.
- The principal celebrant's chalice is not shared; concelebrating priests should receive both Sacred Species by intinction (*or they should have individual chalices for the reception of the Precious Blood*).
- The optional sign of peace may be exchanged in some form that does not involve physical contact: for example, a bow toward or wave to others. It also can continue to be omitted.
- Our churches, as houses of God, should continue to be kept clean, specifically the sanitizing of frequently touched surfaces and objects. Cleaning between Masses is no longer required.
- Holy water may be placed in fonts, provided that the Holy Water is replaced at least weekly and fonts cleaned. Otherwise, Holy water fonts should remain empty.
- Churches should continue to assure good ventilation by introducing fresh air, whenever possible.
- Hand sanitizer should remain available at the entrances of our churches and buildings and should be available for those serving in any ministry at Mass, particularly before the distribution of Holy Communion.

Baptisms and Anointings

- Baptisms continue to use only fresh water for each baptism and the fonts are to be cleaned afterwards.
- Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated in the normal fashion, i.e., without the use of cotton balls.
- Cotton balls are no longer necessary for Confirmations.

In implementing these protocols, prudential judgment should be used in serving those entrusted to your pastoral care. I encourage you to discuss these matters with your parishioners and in consultation with your parish pastoral councils, if possible.

Pastors are asked to recognize that it will take time for all in our communities to feel comfortable in resuming pre-pandemic activities. Please communicate that there are no longer any capacity restrictions on houses of worship, and to err on the side of caution we will continue prudent and sensible practices to clean our churches and assure the safety of our parishioners.

I am most grateful to you for your patience, dedication, cooperation, and your pastoral outreach to your parishioners during this trying time. May God bless you all! Specific protocol questions may be directed to Father Kevin O'Brien.