

OFFICE OF WORSHIP

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 14, 2021
To: All Parishes and Institutions of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
From: Reverend Tom Margevičius, Director, Office of Worship
Re: **Revised Liturgical Guidelines: “Safely Sunsetting” without Masks**

I. Introduction

On May 6, 2021, Governor Walz issued [Executive Order 21-21](#), subtitled “Safely Sunsetting COVID-19 Public Health Restrictions.” Accordingly, the Office of Worship issued a Memo May 12 describing three phases of relaxed liturgical restrictions. On May 13, the [Centers for Disease Control](#) stated, “Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing masks or physically distancing, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws.” Consequently, on May 14, the Governor issued Order 21-23, curtailing the earlier mask mandate; but it did not change social distance guidelines. Further, it indicated that individual entities—e.g. particular businesses or municipalities—may adopt guidelines for their own settings that are more cautious. For our purposes, this means each Pastor should determine suitable guidelines for his own parish in reference to his own municipality, including establishing a pastoral timeline to implement any changes. This Office of Worship Memo takes all this into account, thereby revising and replacing the May 12 Memo. As always, contact me with questions. margeviciust@archspm.org

II. Facemasks. Those fully vaccinated are not at significant risk for contracting or spreading the coronavirus and need no longer wear facemasks. (Masks are still required in airplanes, public transportation, homeless shelters, and other close-quarter settings.) Those not vaccinated are safer if they continue to wear facemasks, but Governor Walz indicates it would have been untenable to retain the mask mandate for unvaccinated people, which would have created a vaccine passport situation. Even so, individuals who are more comfortable wearing a facemask may continue doing so.

III. What this Memo Does Not Cover

This Memo does not concern the current school year or beginning of the fall semester in our schools, summer school, Vacation Bible School, faith formation, sporting events, or private social gatherings. Please contact relevant offices for information on these. This Memo also does not detail sanitation protocols. Please refer to the MN Department of Health [website](#), the [CDC](#), and Catholic Mutual Insurance for more information. It is still necessary to have a COVID [Preparedness Plan](#).

IV. Ongoing General Safety Protocols

- A. If you are sick, stay at home.** Please take care of yourself, and do your part to protect others from becoming infected.
- B. Vulnerable persons and those caring for them should stay safe.** Attend nonobligatory gatherings only to the extent that you (and those you care for) judge the risk of infection to be low.
- C. Do what you are comfortable doing.** An individual may always practice more restrictive facemask and social distance standards than are required.
- D. Sanitization is effective.** Regularly washing hands with soap and water and using hand sanitizer helps avoid both contracting and spreading infection.
- E. Vaccines are still recommended.** COVID vaccines help achieve herd immunity and are now available for those as young as 12. See [here](#) for information.

V. Social Distance for Faith Services/Ceremonies, Receptions, or Gatherings

A. Before May 28

- 1. Indoors.** Six feet of separation is required between households. Up to 10 persons may be seated at one table/in one pew.
- 2. Outdoors.** There is no requirement to keep distance.

B. After May 28. No requirement to keep social distance, indoors or outdoors.

VI. Size of Gatherings. For faith services/ceremonies, there is no maximum number of attendants at services indoors or outdoors, provided six feet is maintained.

A. Before May 28

- 1. Indoors.** For non-worship events, 50% capacity, up to 250 persons. For very large spaces, see this [MDH website](#) for allowing additional capacity.
- 2. Outdoors.** No occupancy or distance requirements.

B. After May 28. No limit, indoors or outdoors.

VII. Obligation to Attend Mass

The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation continues to be suspended. The bishops of Minnesota will soon reinstate the obligation, and will communicate this to all the faithful. Accommodations for those with fragile health, as well as those caring them, will also be indicated. The Office of Communications is preparing materials to assist parishes to catechize the faithful on the importance of attending in person and welcoming everyone back to church.

VIII. Funeral Visitations and Luncheons, Wedding Receptions, Coffee and Donuts

These are all permitted, following the social distance and gathering size guidelines above. For how to [serve food safely](#) at such indoor events, please check [the MDH](#). After May

28, parishes may allow these events without restricting how many, how closely, or how long people interact.

IX. Congregational Singing

The MDH [Guidelines for Music Activities](#) continues to recommend, “Maintain social distance of at least 6 feet between performers (singers and musicians) and encourage more distance if possible. Performers must have a dedicated space within a venue while performing, and must be separated from [congregants] by a distance of at least 12 feet.”

X. Suitable Liturgical Ministers

Given that removing social distance requirements admits more ministers into the sanctuary, each Pastor should establish prudent guidelines when assigning liturgical ministers, always respecting each’s level of comfort. Limiting the age of liturgical ministers no longer seems necessary.

XI. Other Liturgical Details

- A. Baptismal Fonts and Holy Water Stoups.** The Archdiocese is consulting experts regarding how and when these may safely be refilled. At present, Baptisms should continue to be conducted by pouring fresh water (instead of immersion), and water that has contacted the recipient should be reverently disposed of following the liturgy.
- B. Hymnals and other Reusable Liturgy Aids.** After May 28, these may be placed in pews for multiple use, though disposable aids are still safer.
- C. Collection and Presentation of Gifts.** After July 1, parishes may resume passing the basket (though it is safer to use long-handled collection baskets) and gifts may be brought forward with bread and wine at the Preparation of the Altar. Continue to encourage electronic and online giving, which parishes have discovered to provide a reliable income stream, helpful for planning the parish budget.
- D. Sign of Peace and other Physical Contact.** Because the coronavirus spreads mostly through respiration, hand-to-hand touch is less risky, especially during this phase of pandemic sunseting. After July 1, persons from different households may exchange the Sign of Peace with a handshake or other touch. However, this should not be forced upon those uncomfortable with physical contact.
- E. Communion Distribution.** After May 28, distribution of Holy Communion to the assembly is no longer to be deferred to after Mass; it is to occur after the clergy have received, before the Prayer after Communion. Moreover, parishes that are no longer roping off every other pew should distribute Communion in familiar Communion lines as was done prior to the pandemic. It is recommended that ministers sanitize hands before and after distributing, but communicants are not required to sanitize before receiving. Ministers and/or recipients may still wear masks if desired.

Ministers should sanitize their hands after contact with someone's mouth when distributing Communion on the tongue.

- F. The Blood of Christ.** We continue to ask that only one person drink from any one chalice. Consequently, only those may drink the Blood of Christ who are also canonically permitted to purify the chalice: clergy and duly-instituted acolytes. Priests may intinct the Host in the Blood of Christ and place it on a communicant's tongue, provided extra care is observed and the priest sanitizes his hands should he touch someone's mouth. Parishes are reminded that distributing Holy Communion, including the Blood of Christ, in disposable vessels is strictly forbidden.
- XII. Communion to the Homebound.** Resume these pastoral visits as soon as possible. As always, respect the protocols of the institution you are visiting (including masks, if required). If any protocols are problematic for Catholic sensibilities (e.g. asking the minister to place the Host in a disposable vessel), please contact the Office of Worship.
- XIII. Anointing with Holy Oil.** The Oil of Catechumens, of the Sick, and Holy Chrism may be applied with the thumb, though one may also use a cotton ball or swab (which must be reverently disposed of by burning after the liturgy). The minister should still sanitize his hand after every contact with a recipient.
- XIV. Faculty to Confirm.** The faculty to confirm Catholic students in their own parish's confirmation preparation program continues to be granted to Pastors and Parochial Administrators through summer 2021. When that faculty will be rescinded will be communicated soon.
- XV. Sacrament of Reconciliation.** With the removal of social distance and facemask restrictions, it no longer seems necessary to relocate confessions to a wide-open space. Pastors are encouraged to resume celebrating individual confessions (Form I) in the confessional, as per can. 964 §3: "Except for a just reason, confessions are not to be heard elsewhere than in a confessional." When the permission to grant General Absolution will be rescinded will be communicated soon.
- XVI. Live-streamed and Pre-recorded Liturgies.** Parishes are encouraged to continue broadcasting liturgies online, both live-streamed and pre-recorded.
- XVII. Priesthood Ordination 10:00am Sat. May 29, 2021 at the Cathedral of St. Paul.** The entire Archdiocese is welcomed to attend in person, and it will also be livestreamed via the Cathedral's Facebook page. Neither social distancing nor facemasks are necessary. Come and celebrate the first fully open Archdiocesan celebration in a year and a half!