



Directives for Resuming Public Liturgies in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Updated June 1, 2020

The “[Back on Track Indiana](#)” plan permits indoor worship services to resume, provided that we are attentive to health protocols outlined in “Revised Guidance for Places of Worship” ([found here](#)).

Public Masses in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend are therefore permitted to resume as of **the weekend of May 23-24** with Masses of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, so long as the following directives are adhered to.

Note that if individual counties or other local governments within the diocese issue more restrictive directives, these must also be closely followed.

Parishes that are not yet equipped to implement all the necessary precautions should not celebrate public liturgies until they are able and ready.

In addition, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is extended for all Catholics in the diocese through August 15, 2020, at which point it will be reevaluated.

STRICT SOCIAL DISTANCING:

1. The state has not prescribed a specific numerical limit to the number of people who can attend indoor church services. However, social distancing measures must be implemented in every parish to continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. According to the state, this means ensuring “6 feet between individuals or family units of the same households during services.” Socially distanced seating is therefore the deciding factor for how many can be gathered in a church at one time.
2. To that end, at least every other pew must be unoccupied, though a pastor may decide – based on his church’s configuration and the distance between pews in his parish church, or for other reasons – to increase the required spacing to every three pews. Consider having at least a portion of pews dedicated to seating in every third pew. Unused pews must be blocked off.

If helpful, pews could be marked with tape to outline 6-foot intervals and help gauge distances for seating.

3. Some sort of oversight will be required to keep track of when a church's socially distanced capacity is reached. At that point, no additional people may be admitted into the church building.



4. Social distancing measures should be observed when the assembly enters and exits the church (for example, dismissal could be done by row starting from the back). A plan should also be enacted for restrooms, limiting occupancy and marking how a waiting line should form. And tape must be placed on the floor to mark proper distancing during the Communion procession. Participants must also be asked to observe social distancing outside the church and in the parking lot.

OTHER HEALTH PROTOCOLS:

1. **Masks:** The “Back on Track Indiana” plan recommends wearing masks or other face coverings in public settings, including religious services. As noted by health authorities, the use of masks is not primarily for our own protection, but for those around us.

All congregants (except for infants and toddlers and those who would have trouble breathing) must wear such face coverings out of concern for fellow parishioners.

Surgical masks or cloth face coverings may be made available by parishes for members of the faithful to keep and take home, provided they can be safely distributed. (Contact the Office of Worship if you would like specific recommendations on this matter.)

During the celebration of the liturgy itself, clergy should not wear masks. Other ministers actively assisting in the sanctuary can wear masks or cloth face coverings, but are not required to. Everyone in the sanctuary must remain 6 feet apart from one another. Anyone speaking at the ambo or a podium should not wear a mask or face covering, and should also be greater than 6 feet from the nearest parishioner.

Clergy should wear masks before and after liturgical celebrations if interacting with the faithful.

(See below under “Distribution of Holy Communion” for mask protocols at Communion.)

2. High-contact surfaces (such as door handles and crash bars, as well as pew tops, backs, and ends) must be cleaned and disinfected between every Mass or other event in the church. Microphones should not be touched, and they should be sanitized with each church cleaning.

Consult [these CDC guidelines](#) for cleaning and disinfecting facilities. This [page from the EPA](#) catalogs cleaning products that claim effectiveness against the coronavirus.



(Parishes may wish to be extra careful not to damage the finish on pews or other furnishings by testing on a small section with the cleaners they plan to use.)

3. As recommended by the state, please make every effort to “place hand sanitizers in high-contact locations (e.g. bathroom, entry, exit) and ask staff, members, and guests to sanitize their hands before entering the building.” (Effective hand sanitizers should have at least 60% alcohol content.) Also ensure that handwashing supplies are properly stocked in parish restrooms.

Parishioners are also encouraged to bring their own hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes.

4. Holy water and baptismal fonts must remain empty except during baptisms.
5. Avoid handing out physical materials such as bulletins, and do not plan social gatherings after Mass.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

1. Reminders should be posted that anyone with a cough or fever, or who may otherwise be feeling sick, should not come to church for Mass or even for a visit.
2. Indiana’s health protocols for places of worship also advise “all individuals who are 65 and above or who have an underlying at-risk health condition to stay home.” While our more vulnerable brothers and sisters cannot be prevented from attending, we should nevertheless recommend that they continue to participate in Mass remotely at this stage of the pandemic.
3. All priests, deacons, and others who assist them at Mass should review their own health, screening themselves for symptoms of COVID-19. If any symptoms of illness are present, they must not celebrate or assist at a Mass (unless the priest celebrates Mass by himself).

SCHEDULING OF MASSES:

1. With smaller congregation sizes due to social distancing, consideration can be given to adding Sundays Masses. **From May 24 to August 15, 2020, Bishop Rhoades grants all priests with faculties in our diocese permission to celebrate four Masses on a Sunday.**
2. Other options to accommodate more of the faithful may be explored. Where feasible, Bishop Rhoades grants permission for Masses to be held outdoors, provided proper reverence and social distancing can be maintained.



3. Parishes might consider ways to spread out attendance at Masses – for example, a rotation system based on the first letter of last names, or an online ticketing system like Eventbrite (<https://www.eventbrite.com/>), etc.
4. Parishes that have been livestreaming their Masses might consider continuing the practice for the benefit of those vulnerable individuals who still cannot attend in person.
5. If there is a localized outbreak of COVID-19 involving a particular community or parish, pastors should immediately consult with the Vicar General about potentially suspending Masses at their parishes.

LITURGICAL MEASURES AND CONSIDERATIONS SURROUNDING MASS:

1. Consider scheduling only the minimum necessary ministers and personnel for Mass.
2. **Singing & Music:** There is evidence (including examples involving choirs in other states) that singing, especially in close proximity to others, greatly increases the risk of viral spread by aerosoling respiratory particles in a manner more akin to coughing or sneezing than mere talking. This causes particles to travel beyond six feet, and even surgical masks don't effectively contain them. Infectious disease experts with whom we have consulted believe that this poses an unacceptable risk that would negate the beneficial effects of distancing and masks. As such, **congregational and choral singing is suspended until it is determined that it is reasonably safe.**

The only singing currently allowed at public liturgies is by a cantor (effectively a soloist) who must sing with a microphone from an enclosed space – either a room separate from the main body of the church (e.g., repurposed cry room, reconciliation room, unused sacristy) or from an enclosed booth or box specially constructed for this purpose.

Instrumental music (e.g., organ, piano, string instruments, etc.) is still permitted, but woodwind and brass instruments also should not be used because they spread aerosols even further.

It remains acceptable to employ just instrumental music, or to forgo music entirely during this time.

3. Missalettes and hymnals cannot be effectively cleaned between Masses. They should therefore be removed from the pews until further notice. Worship aids, if used, should be printed for each individual Mass and then destroyed.



4. It is strongly recommended that the person responsible for preparing the vessels, bread, and wine before Mass wear a mask and non-latex gloves (many people are allergic to latex). Chalices and wine should not be prepared for the people since Communion will only be under the form of bread. Careful handwashing and hygiene is essential.
5. Social distancing should be maintained throughout the liturgical action, including six feet between the liturgical procession and any congregants. For the presidential prayers, the priest could place the missal on a stand at the chair or else on the altar, rather than having a server hold the book.
6. Neither gift-bearers nor any offertory procession should be utilized; rather, the vessels should all be placed on the credence table. Keep all vessels covered until they are brought to the altar.
7. Collection baskets that are passed from person to person may not be utilized. It is preferred that a collection basket or locked “poor box” be placed at the entrance(s) of the church. Alternatively, baskets with handles may be used (in which case ushers are to wear gloves and immediately wash their hands after the collection). Consider “quarantining” the collected money for 3 days before counting it.
8. The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance.
9. When hosts for the faithful are consecrated, they could be placed in their own vessels on a separate corporal towards the side of the altar, so that they are not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic Prayer. Additional palls may be placed over those elements at the appropriate times, if desired.
10. All should refrain from holding hands during the Our Father, if this is a custom. The Sign of Peace should not be given by the customary handshake. It could be exchanged without physical contact – for example, by a bow of the head. Or it can be omitted altogether.
11. The person responsible for the care of the vessels after Mass is to ensure that they are thoroughly cleaned. After being purified according to the rubrics, Mass vessels are to be carefully washed with hot, soapy water.

DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION:

1. The distribution of Holy Communion poses the greatest challenges in terms of safe practice. While risk can never be completely removed, carefully implementing the following measures should make Communion possible without unreasonable risk, even though communicant and minister are in close, albeit brief, proximity.



The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful should continue to take place at the normal time during Mass.

2. At some point during Mass, the priest may explain to the assembly that those who desire to receive Holy Communion at the appointed time may do so, but that those who are not comfortable doing so are under no obligation to receive and may therefore remain in their pews. The procedure and expectations for distribution of Communion should also be clearly explained in advance.
3. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the people remains suspended. Concelebrating priests may receive by intinction or via a separate chalice.
4. Clergy who are in a higher-risk group may opt to refrain from distributing Communion, in which case other clergy might distribute in their place – or Communion may be distributed solely by extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who are not in the higher-risk group if necessary.
5. During the distribution of Holy Communion, clergy and extraordinary ministers must wear masks or face coverings. They should also use hand sanitizer immediately before distributing Communion (and after applying any facial coverings).
6. A distance of 6 feet must be maintained between individuals or family units in the Communion procession. This may mean that parallel Communion lines cannot be formed in aisles. Tape must be placed on the floor to mark proper distancing during the Communion procession. If feasible, a parish might optionally offer hand sanitizer to those coming forward in the Communion procession.
7. Gloves should not be worn by anyone distributing or receiving Holy Communion. If those distributing Communion follow prescribed hand hygiene before fulfilling their role, then gloves are unnecessary and offer no additional safeguards to those receiving Communion. Using tongs or other instruments to attempt to distribute Communion is prohibited, due to how easily the hosts could be dropped.
8. Receiving Communion on the tongue remains an option, but it may be discouraged because it does involve an increased risk of contamination.

If giving Communion on the tongue, ministers must take special care not to touch any part of the communicant's mouth. If ministers sense that they have touched the tongue or mouth of the communicant, they should purify their fingers in an ablution cup and then wash or sanitize their hands before continuing with Communion. A further possibility would be to ask those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue to present themselves for Communion in a separate line or after all others have received.



9. Communion in the hand is also a potential means of transmission, so every effort must be made to avoid hand-to-hand contact. If ministers sense that hand-to-hand contact has been made, they should purify their fingers in an ablution cup and then wash or sanitize their hands before continuing with Communion.
10. It should not be necessary for ministers to use hand sanitizer between each communicant if actual person-to-person contact has not occurred.
11. Physical contact should not be made with a communicant who comes forward for words of blessing.
12. All ordinary and extraordinary ministers should purify their fingers and use hand sanitizer after distributing Communion.

SACRAMENTS & OTHER LITURGICAL RITES:

1. **Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may continue**, incorporating all the applicable social distancing, health protocols, and liturgical measures noted above.

At weddings, the bride and groom are not required to wear masks or face coverings. Wedding pictures must follow aforementioned social distancing and health protocols, and receptions should not be held at parishes.

2. **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament** may again be scheduled, following all applicable stipulations noted above.
3. **Confession:** Confessions may once again be held at scheduled times.

For individual confessions, 6 feet must be maintained between priest and penitent. Confessions may be heard outdoors. If indoors, it is recommended that a large room or open area be utilized – traditional confessional boxes or booths cannot be safely utilized at this time. Social distancing should also be clearly marked for those in the confession line.

Whether indoors or outdoors, the secrecy of the confession must be maintained. No one else should be near enough to hear the confession.

4. **RCIA:** Once a parish is able to meet the new protocols for public liturgies, postponed initiations may be completed.



After that point, baptized candidates for full communion can be received at any Mass using the Rite of Reception starting at RCIA no. 487.

And as Bishop Rhoades previously noted, the elect have been dispensed from needing to complete any preparatory rites they missed during the suspension of public liturgies.

The baptismal liturgy from the Easter Vigil (starting with RCIA no. 218) would be used when rescheduling initiation of the elect, following the rubrics for a situation “outside the Easter Vigil.” Unless the proper Mass of the day takes precedence (such as Sundays of Easter, solemnities, and other times listed in GIRM no. 372), this would be done within the Ritual Mass for Baptism. The Lectionary provides readings for “Christian Initiation Apart from the Easter Vigil” (nos. 751-755). The priest should refrain from touching the water while blessing it, and all should follow the directives for Baptism found below.

For joint initiation of elect and candidates, utilize the combined rites found at RCIA no. 566.

Given how long these rites can take, scheduling these initiations on weekdays is an option so as not to prolong the amount of time the faithful must remain in the church for a Sunday Mass during social distancing. If a scheduled Mass will feature initiations, this should be clearly made known to parishioners ahead of time. Parishes with larger groups of elect can also do multiple small batches of initiations if social distancing recommends it.

As noted in Bishop Rhoades’s letter from May 5th, parishes may wish to consider celebrating the sacraments of initiation at the Vigil Mass of Pentecost on Saturday, May 30th, for those who would have received them at the Easter Vigil. Parish could celebrate the Extended Form of the Vigil Mass for Pentecost, which is found in the Roman Missal and is similar to the Easter Vigil. The Extended Form includes four readings from the Old Testament, followed by the Gloria and Collect, an epistle reading, and Gospel (the *Lectionary for Mass Supplement* that was published in 2017 contains all the readings for the Extended Form). The sacraments of initiation would be celebrated after the homily.

5. **Baptisms:** Social distancing must be maintained during the rites insofar as possible. All in attendance, including the priest or deacon, the elect, and godparents must wear masks or face coverings, except little children and those who have trouble breathing.

Immersion or wading in a baptismal pool is prohibited. Water should be blessed in an individual vessel and then poured over the candidate’s head into the font – with the minister taking care not to touch the water or the person being baptized. Fresh water should always be used and then properly discarded afterwards.



If there are multiple baptisms, fresh water is poured each time. If it seems advisable, before each subsequent baptism, the water in the font could be reverently emptied.

During infant baptisms, the entire rite should take place at the font, only parents should touch the infant during the signing, the oil of catechumens and the sacred chrism may be conferred with cotton balls, and the ephphatha should be omitted.

6. **Confirmations:** Please note that when Confirmations do occur anytime during this pandemic, the chrism must be applied by hand without the use of gloves or a cotton ball – otherwise it is invalid. It may be advisable to sanitize the thumb between each Confirmation. Chrism and the containers should be reverently disposed of or burned.
7. **First Communion:** As noted above and in Bishop Rhoades's letter from May 5th, the weekend of May 17-18 is reserved throughout the diocese as a potential time to celebrate First Holy Communion Masses. First Communicants should not receive from the chalice this year, and social distancing must be maintained at all times among the First Communicants (including for any photographs of the class).
8. **Pastoral Care of the Sick & Homebound:** No one with symptoms of illness should visit the sick or homebound. The proper precautionary measures (including thorough hand washing and social distancing) must be followed in any visits to the sick or homebound.

The protocols and directives of hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities must be followed in pastoral visits to the sick, including the use of masks, gloves, or gowns. The same or similar precautions should be taken when visiting the sick in their homes, especially if the sick person has or is suspected to have COVID-19. In such cases, the priest may use a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball in anointing the sick person. The cotton should be burned or buried after use.

Keep in mind that anointing cannot validly be conferred unless the priest himself applies the oil of the sick to the patient. A nurse (for example) cannot do it for him.

Proper precautions should also be taken in hearing confessions and giving Holy Communion during pastoral visits to the sick. Again, priests are to follow the directives of our local and state health officials when ministering to persons with COVID-19. Keep in mind that quarantine may be required if the proper protocols are not followed.

No priest over 60 years of age or who has two or more chronic illnesses (the high-risk group for more serious problems if the coronavirus is contracted) should visit or minister the sacraments to a patient with COVID-19. If a priest in this condition is contacted to minister in such a situation, he should ask another priest without this restriction to minister to such a patient.