



To: All Priests
From: The Office of the Vicar General
Date: June 6, 2020
Re: Preliminary Reopening Procedures

***** URGENT MEMO *****

Dear Brothers,

Over the past several weeks, we have been in contact with our two county executives, both of whom have been responsive, understanding and very supportive. This past week, the Diocese of Rockville Centre, **on our own**, communicated Bishop Barres' intention to **move ahead with our own plan** to open our parishes for public worship in the coming weeks, at a percentage of each church's capacity. Our county executives communicated this plan to Governor Cuomo. In response, *earlier today* the Governor announced the following:

When each region of the State reaches Phase 2, Houses of Worship in that region can open at 25% of capacity.

The Long Island Region does not reach Phase 2 until Wednesday, June 10.

We know that this does not offer us much time to prepare. Our very best is all that we can do.

It is **essential** that we all cooperate with the directives included below and those that the Diocese will issue in the coming days to assist you with this phased reopening. Our parishes cannot become places of conflict between each other over following these regulations consistently. Likewise, we must avoid individual parishes being accused of violating safety precautions by not following these directives. Therefore, please review the following information carefully. **More detailed directives will be sent to you in the coming days.** The directives below are for your more immediate assistance.

1. Beginning **Wednesday, June 10, 2020**, you may host all public liturgies and Sacraments (Mass, weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.) in churches / indoor facilities with 25% of your building capacity in attendance. **The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect indefinitely.** Those who are sick or vulnerable due to age or health conditions are strongly encouraged to remain at home and view the Mass on television or online.

It is recommended that you close / block access to 2 of every 3 pews (*one pew open, the next two closed, one pew open, the next two closed*). Some suggested methods of closing pews are printed signs placed on the seats of the pews, ropes, and / or blue painter's tape that will not damage the finish on wooden pews. Do not use other types of tape on wooden pews.

2. Families and those who traveled to the church together may sit together. All others must maintain social distancing (**6 feet apart**). With one pew open out of every three, plus the social distancing for non-family members, the 25% rule will easily be maintained.
3. Masks (or cloth facial coverings) **must be worn** by all present. However, the priest celebrant will **not** wear a mask during the celebration of the Holy Mass. Therefore, any assistants should generally maintain 6 feet of distance from the priest celebrant. **NOTE:** Masks or facial

coverings should **not** be worn by children under two years of age or by anyone with breathing difficulties. This should be widely understood so as to prevent conflicts between parishioners.

Facial coverings have been a common practice for several months. Please emphasize to your people that they will not be admitted without one. Any homemade mask or scarf is sufficient, provided that it covers the nose and mouth.

Over the past several weeks despite many challenges, the Diocese has been securing supplies of masks and hand sanitizer, *which were not easy to obtain*, that will be made available at key locations, along with detailed instructions for their use. The number of masks is limited. They are not meant to be distributed to the people. Most people have their own and must bring their own. The supply given to the parish is to be kept for clergy, staff and those few who might not have one for Mass, or who might forget to bring one (especially among the elderly).

It is best to keep servers / assistants to a minimum (perhaps delaying using them for several weeks). Since altar servers will be masked, they are reasonably protected from spreading or being exposed to viruses.

4. Holy Water fonts should remain empty. However, Holy Water dispensers (tanks) can remain available for people to take Holy Water home with them.
5. All clergy and assistants for the liturgy must wash or sanitize their hands immediately before the liturgy begins. Clergy and anyone in the sanctuary are **not** to wear gloves. The Center for Disease Control recommends wearing gloves **only** when cleaning or when caring for the sick.
6. Hymnals / missals should be removed from the pews. Bulletins should not be distributed.
7. Although hymnals will not be available, cantors and a small group of singers may be used, provided they maintain a social distance greater than 6 feet from others and are wearing masks.
8. There is to be no entrance, offertory or recessional procession so as to avoid close contact with numerous people.
9. The Sign of Peace continues to be omitted until further notice so as to avoid confusion. Force of habit, children, and those unable to understand “adapted” signs of peace leave too much room for error.
10. Collection baskets should not be passed around. It is recommended that collection stations be provided where the faithful can simply drop their collection into a basket or container before or after Mass, or that baskets with poles be used in order to avoid contact.
11. **Holy Communion is not to be distributed until further notice.** We realize that this is not ideal. Please understand:
 - A. These measures are temporary and made in response to extraordinary circumstances.
 - B. If we do not take certain reasonable precautions, we could not only risk health concerns, but could also put the Church at risk of having more unreasonable limitations imposed upon us.
 - C. As mentioned above, you will receive instructions regarding the supply of hand sanitizer provided by the Diocese that will assist you in the safe distribution of Holy Communion. This hand sanitizer is not meant for the general use of everyone attending the Mass. You would quickly run out of the limited supply. People should be encouraged to wash their hands and use their own sanitizer. **The supply that will be provided to you is meant only for those who will distribute Holy Communion when that becomes permissible.** Please follow the instructions that will be sent to you in the coming week.

- D. This temporary period provides an opportunity to instruct your people on the procedures that are to be followed when distribution of Holy Communion will resume. Those instructions will be sent to you in a subsequent Memo.
- E. One's physical presence at the celebration of Holy Mass, even without the reception of Holy Communion, is immeasurably efficacious. To be physically present to our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament, even if we are temporarily unable to physically consume his Most Sacred Body and Precious Blood, is of tremendous benefit to us. Please continue to catechize our people in this regard, encouraging their love and longing for our Lord's true presence. Our plan is to resume distribution of Holy Communion within the next few weeks.
12. It is strongly encouraged that you adjust **Mass times** in order to provide an opportunity for staff and / or volunteers to clean and "air out" the Church between Masses.
13. **Cleaning:**
- A. If possible, open windows and doors between Masses.
- B. If bathrooms are available, they should be cleaned between Masses, using disposable gloves.
- C. Follow the same procedures that you already use for cleaning your church / hall / etc.
- D. Between Masses, wooden pews (especially the surfaces that can be touched) can be cleaned as usual, but should also be disinfected as follows, using disposable gloves:
- Fill a spray bottle with 2 cups water, 1 cup white vinegar and about five drops dish soap.
 - Spray the solution onto the wood areas and wipe off with a damp cleaning rag. Using a damp rag removes traces of the vinegar and soap. Continue across the wood section until the area is cleaned and disinfected.
 - Wipe the furniture with a dry-cleaning rag to remove any excess moisture. Be sure to wash or dispose of any rags and cleaning materials.
14. **Use of Space:** Depending on your parish, you may need to consider the handling of overflow attendance. The use of every third pew will keep you safely within the 25% limit. However, if the people wishing to enter exceed that limit, you must prepare your ushers to use courtesy and common sense. If needed, for your most popular Mass times, you might consider simultaneous Masses in different facilities (gym / hall), as is done in many parishes to accommodate Christmas crowds. Where necessary and possible, added Masses might be required. A "simulcast" to a lower hall is another possibility. **Note:** Where "flexible / movable" seating is available, it is not practical to simply separate all chairs 6 feet apart. This is impractical for families that do not need to social distance.
15. **Volunteers:** It would be wise to organize your ushers and other volunteers to prepare to implement the above measures. This is a time of heightened emotions. Volunteers should be encouraged to remain calm, courteous, and non-tyrannical.

We understand that these are tremendous adjustments. We pray for and encourage a spirit of docility, understanding and patience. Further instructions are being prepared. These are offered so that you may begin to prepare the fundamental needs for reopening.

Oremus pro invicem!

- Fr. Eric R. Fasano
Vicar General