

30 April, 2020

Directives From the Diocese of Fargo

Facilities guidelines for parishes

- All federal and state guidelines indicate that we should still maintain strict physical distancing to mitigate person-to-person transmission of the disease. This means making sure there is at least a 6-foot distance between individuals not of the same household. Each church is different, but in general, this will require:
 - Closing off every other pew and marking appropriate intervals within the pews
 - Marking spacing for the lines to receive communion
 - Marking spacing in any place where people are likely to gather in tighter groups. (Social hall, restrooms, etc.)
- After marking the pews according to the distancing requirements, each pastor should calculate the number of spaces available. This new capacity number should be communicated to the faithful so they are aware of the limited space.
 - There may not always be sufficient space in the church for all who wish to come to Mass. A possible solution is to set up a video stream and seating (according to distancing requirements) in a social hall or other auxiliary space.
 - In any event, overfilling our churches provides the perfect environment for spreading COVID-19, which is exactly what we are to avoid.
- Please regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces according to CDC guidelines. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
 - Frequently touched surfaces in a church may include door handles and restroom facilities. One might also consider regularly sanitizing the top edge of the pew back (where people regularly put their hands). Sanitizing the entire pew does not seem to be necessary.
- In order to minimize points of contact it is recommended to remove all hymnals, missalettes and pew cards.
- Hand sanitizer and other sanitizing cleaners should be available at the parish for keeping the parish facilities, parishioners, and staff protected. Attention to placement (and possible loss) of these items in unattended churches should be considered carefully.
- Open holy water fonts should be emptied, but holy water may be made available to the people to take home with them.
- Social gatherings are not permitted at this time. This includes coffee and rolls, receptions after sacraments, luncheons, etc.

Please Communicate to Parishioners

- Since liturgical guidance and reception of communion focus on sanitizing hands, it might be useful to suggest that people bring their own hand sanitizer to the parish for events.

They can then sanitize their own hands after removing their masks and before entering the communion line.

- The faithful should be encouraged to bring and wear their own cloth face coverings. It should be made clear that although these coverings may provide for one's own protection, they are actually more effective in protecting others by arresting one's own respiratory droplets.
- They should be instructed to receive communion in the hands only.
- Please communicate to all of the faithful that they are dispensed from the Sunday obligation. This is for the benefit of those who are sick, and those who are more vulnerable to the disease (elderly, underlying health conditions). It may also be the case that with the distancing measures in place and resulting smaller capacity of the church not every parishioner will be able to attend Mass every Sunday. They also should know of this dispensation.
- The faithful should understand that these directives are temporary and subject to change. As circumstances change, for better or for worse, they will be modified.

Liturgical Guidelines for Mass

- Ushers should be trained/encouraged to help guide adherence to social distancing guidelines and assisting people with new/unfamiliar flows for finding a pew, entering the line for communion, or departing from the church. It may be a good idea to dismiss by row so that physical distancing is maintained in the exit from the church.
- It is recommended to prop or hold open the doors to the church when people are arriving and departing to avoid repeatedly touching surfaces.
- Strategies to avoid an overfull Church:
 - Communication with the faithful and relying upon their good will may be necessary.
 - Each pastor is free to adjust his Mass schedule and even add a Mass if it will be helpful to accommodate the faithful.
 - Overflow spaces with video feed may be used as long as physical distancing is maintained.
 - Encourage daily Mass attendance when the Church is too full on Sunday.
 - Special provision should be made for the collection. Baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can remain a suitable distance from others. Encouragement of online giving and provision of a (secure/watched) place where offerings might be dropped off when arriving or departing might be considered.
- Although congregational singing and singing in choirs is not allowed, an individual cantor and accompanist, positioned at a sufficient distance from others, may provide music. It is recommended, however, that the ordinary of the Mass be spoken (Gloria, Holy Holy, etc.) so the faithful may join in.
- It is not necessary for the priest to wear a face covering during the celebration of the Mass since he is usually able to maintain sufficient distance from others. Nevertheless,

he is advised to put on a mask during the distribution of communion since distance is not possible at that time, and the faithful who approach to receive will also be unmasked.

- It is recommended that hosts to be consecrated for the faithful be on a separate corporal to the side so the priest's respiratory droplets do not fall upon them.
- Servers and other liturgical ministers may wear face coverings.
- During this time EMHC will not be used. If other clergy are available to distribute communion, they should assist.
- To the extent possible, the other ministers (deacon, servers, lectors) should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other. Seating arrangements and the usual manner of serving the Mass may be adjusted to avoid close contact. (For example, placing the Roman Missal on the altar or on a stand instead of having the server hold it).
- The offertory procession should be omitted.
- Do not hand out bulletins, rather, place them on a stand.

Other Sacraments and Liturgical Prayer

- Confessions should continue using the same physical distancing measures used up to this point (i.e., not using the confessional or other confined space and having at least a 6-foot space between penitent and priest). The use of the cell phone or other electronic device for confessions is not allowed.
- Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals may take place but the physical distancing requirements must be observed.
- Confirmations and First Eucharist may be conferred (either by the bishop, or by the pastor after having received delegation) but the physical distancing requirements must be observed.
- Anointing of the sick should be administered as is possible, and the priest should use legitimate safeguards for protection of the individual, and his own personal protection.
- Priests should continue to exercise prudence in visits to the sick.
- Eucharistic Adoration may be resumed at the pastor's discretion, maintaining physical distancing.

I know we will all be glad to resume the ordinary sacramental and pastoral life of our diocese. The regulations explained above will be somewhat challenging, and will require explanation from you in the specific setting of your parishes. But I pray that they will allow us to serve the faithful while also ensuring the safety of all. Once again, we will make modifications as the situation develops. I am grateful for your pastoral care for your people, and I assure you of my daily prayers as we make our way forward with God's help. God bless you, and stay well.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo