

Diocese of Duluth COVID-19 Protocols

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious threat to the common good.

Physical health and spiritual health are necessary for the good of the whole person.

The following protocols will be put in place to both to check the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to allow for access to public Mass and the Sacraments.

These protocols are based on the current guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with the aid of other local health professionals as well as health experts from the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C.

These guidelines also take into account the Catholic Church's theology, requirements for the celebration of Mass (valid and licit) and Church (liturgical and canon) law. Some of this information comes from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Worship and a Working Group of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C.

Reverence and respect for the Mass and the Sacraments is key to the proper carrying out of these protocols.

The protocols are part of a three-phase approach to balance the challenges presented by the virus and the public participation in the Mass and Sacraments.

NOTE: Until the crisis passes, the obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been lifted. No one should feel obliged to come to church. This will remain in place until it is safe for all to return to church. Sunday remains the Lord's Day so Mass can be followed on television, radio and online with a spiritual communion. Devotional practices such as an hour of silent prayer, the Rosary, scripture reading, or other meditations can mark the day.

If you are not feeling well, 65 or older, or you have an underlying medical condition that puts you at risk for the virus, please stay home.

In the church, please follow the signage in regard to social distancing (6 ft. between people is recommended). The use of masks is highly recommended. The use of hand sanitizers and frequent handwashing (20 seconds is recommended) are expected.

Note: The movement of the following phases can go in either direction depending on the seriousness of the COVID-19 threat at that time.

PHASE I: Public Masses with Strict Limits on Public Gatherings and Strict Physical Distancing

- All public Masses are suspended.
- Times when the church is open should be posted for those who may wish to come and pray before the Lord present in the tabernacle.

- Priests may say a private Mass (Sunday and daily) without a congregation present, remembering their people at Mass.
- Signage should indicate social distancing.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at the doors.
- Holy water fonts will be empty.
- Church pews and doorways should be sanitized regularly. Follow the CDC guidelines for cleaning.
- Hymnals will be removed. Congregational singing of responses and hymns is not permitted as singing is one of the fastest ways to spread the virus.
- Gatherings of more than ten (10) people are not permitted.
- Baptisms, weddings and funerals may take place as long as the measures concerning no giving of Holy Communion, proper hand hygiene, social distancing, and groups of ten (10) or under are followed.
- No funeral receptions are permitted.
- The Sacrament of Penance should be offered at posted times. Proper hand hygiene and social distancing measures should be followed.
- The sick and the dying should be cared for with requested visits, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum.
- Holy Hours with a congregation or Perpetual Adoration should not take place.
- A restroom plan should be developed to limit the number of people who enter the restroom at the same time and indicate (tape) where people should stand when they wait (6 feet between people).

PHASE II: Public Masses with Moderate Limits on Public Gatherings and Moderate Physical Distancing

- Masses may be celebrated provided that the congregation does not exceed one third (1/3) of the seating capacity of the church. It may be necessary to offer more Masses if necessary, encourage people to come on other days of the week instead of Sunday, and/or use an online signup to ensure the number of congregants does not exceed the agreed upon limit.
- If needed, a pastor can seek permission from the Bishop's office to hold parking lot masses where the altar is outside, the faithful remain in their cars, and these protocols are observed including those protocols concerning the distribution of Holy Communion. Law enforcement should be notified as a courtesy. Any other form of outdoor Mass would need permission as well.

- Signage should indicate social distancing. Signs and other instructions will encourage normal safe practices (e.g. cough or sneeze into shirt sleeve, handkerchief, or tissue, avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth).
- Times when the church is open should be posted for those who may wish to come and pray before the Lord present in the tabernacle.
- Interior doors should be propped open and where possible, one-way traffic patterns would be introduced to ensure social distancing. Ushers will assist when necessary.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at the doors.
- Holy water fonts will be empty (a suggestion: providing small plastic holy water bottles so that the faithful may have them at home or carry them should they choose to bless themselves with holy water).
- Two out of every three pews should be marked off so that people do not sit too close to each other (unless they are members of the same household living together).
- People should be highly encouraged to bring their own facemasks and gloves. Follow the CDC guidelines for face covering.
- Special attention should be given to children to make sure social distancing is practiced. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on children under the age of two (2).
- People will be instructed not to greet each other with touching.
- Ventilation will be increased as much as possible, opening windows and doors as weather permits.
- Church pews and doorways should be sanitized regularly, before and after each Mass. Follow the CDC guidelines for cleaning.
- Hymnals will be removed. Congregational singing of responses and hymns is not permitted as this is one of the fastest ways to spread the virus.
- Collection plates and other items will not be passed from person to person.
- Large choirs singing close together should be avoided. A small schola or a cantor are allowed if they are appropriately distanced.
- Baptisms, weddings, and funerals may take place as long as the measures concerning proper hand hygiene, social distancing, and group limit (1/3 of the seating capacity of the church) are followed.
- No funeral receptions are permitted.
- The Sacrament of Penance should be offered at posted times. Proper hand hygiene and social distancing measures should be followed.

- The sick and the dying should be cared for with requested visits, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum.
- Holy Hours with a congregation or Perpetual Adoration can take place as long as the measures concerning proper hand hygiene, social distancing, and group limit (one third of the seating capacity of the church) take place.
- A restroom plan should be developed to limit the number of people who enter the restroom at the same time and indicate (tape) where people should stand when they wait (6 feet between people).

Due to the differences in churches and the unique needs that might arise in the parish, there may be variances in application or additional measures needed. Should a question arise, pastors should consult with the Office of the Bishop or the Diocesan Department of Liturgy.

Note: If church leadership becomes aware of a clear, immediate, and imminent threat to the safety of the congregation or determines that the above-mentioned protocols cannot be observed, the gathering will be cancelled until the protocols can be observed.

The Celebration of Mass:

- A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public Masses or administering Sacraments. The same holds for other liturgical ministers (deacons, servers, lectors, cantors).
- The priest and other liturgical ministers will not wear masks and gloves during the celebration of Mass. They will remain 6 feet from the congregation as much as possible. The other liturgical ministers (deacons, servers, lectors, cantors) should do the same.
- One server is permitted. Two servers are permitted if they are from the same family.
- The procession may be done in the usual way.
- The server could hold the Missal but the Missal could also be placed on the altar or on a podium at the celebrant's chair.
- The offertory procession should be omitted.
- Special provision should be made for the collection. Baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long handled baskets are acceptable as long as the ushers can remain at a suitable distance. A central basket with an usher in attendance as the faithful enter the church would be suitable as well.
- An alternative to using a server would be to place a table next to the altar with the requisites for Mass, including the wine and water.

- A sufficient quantity of hosts for the faithful should be consecrated at the Mass but placed on a corporal on the side of the altar to allow the priest to consecrate the main host without fear of breathing on the hosts for the faithful.
- For the elevation of the sacred species, if a deacon is present, he may stand next to the priest and elevate the chalice.
- The physical exchange of the sign of peace is suspended.
- The priest/deacon would consume the Holy Eucharist in the normal way but not immediately give Holy Communion to the servers or faithful. Rather, the hosts would be placed in the tabernacle awaiting the conclusion of the Mass.
- After the blessing and dismissal, the priest/deacon remain in the sanctuary. At the chair, the priest removes his chasuble and the deacon removes his dalmatic.
- Vested in alb and stole, the priest/deacon removes the hosts from the tabernacle and returns to the altar.
- Holding up a single host, the priest says, “Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.” The priest then leads the people saying, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”
- The priest and other ministers present move to the stations for Holy Communion. The priest/deacon is highly encouraged to wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion.
- The faithful may wear masks when coming to Holy Communion but they may not wear gloves. They may use hand sanitizer before receiving Holy Communion.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

While different options are possible concerning the distribution of Holy Communion (Mass without distributing Holy Communion, Mass with the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass, Mass followed by the Distribution of Holy Communion with Special Precautions), as a temporary measure during Phase II, we will use Mass followed by Distribution of Holy Communion with Special Precautions, the reason being that this option reduces risk for the faithful as well as the priest/deacon. It also allows practical movement of the faithful out of pews as well as giving the faithful more freedom to go to Holy Communion or not. This option would also allow the priest/deacon to take off their chasuble/dalmatic before distributing Holy Communion as they are more difficult to clean. This is the option we will also use for weddings and funerals.

Distribution of Holy Communion requires special care. The directives given here reflect both the Church’s great reverence for the Eucharist and the powerful sacramental and

liturgical symbolism of Holy Communion, while also providing appropriate precautions against infection.¹

Prior to the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest will explain how those who desire to receive Holy Communion will be able to do so, explaining especially that they must maintain a 6 foot distance between people as they come forward. Tape will be placed on the floor to indicate proper spacing between people. No one is required to come forward who does not feel comfortable doing so.

- Holy Communion will be given to the people only by the consecrated host. The practice of Communion under Both Kinds is suspended. A deacon or concelebrating priest may receive by intinction.
- A small table will be placed at each communion station with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The number of Communion stations and ministers of Communion should be limited so that the 6-foot distance can be maintained at all times. Holy Communion may be distributed in the usual manner or by the priest/deacon moving along a 'rail' line.
- The priest/deacon may put on a mask and should sanitize his hands before distributing Communion. Gloves are not necessary since hand hygiene is effective against the virus.
- The priest/deacon takes his place next to the Communion station.
- The faithful remove their face coverings as they approach the priest.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way.²

¹ Here we are taking into account the FDA Food Safety recommendations, it is important to note their statement: "Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission" (<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>). The CDC adds: "Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food... It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads" (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#How-COVID-19-Spreads>).

² Experts at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., in consultation with medical experts have carefully considered the question of communion on the tongue vs. communion in the hand. Given the Church's existing guidance on this point (see *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, they believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without additional risk. The mouth and the hand pose the same risk of infection if they are touched.

- If the priest/deacon senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hand or mouth, he is to pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer.
- The priest/deacon may repeat this as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- It is not necessary to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless actual contact is made.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest and any other ministers return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle.
- The priest then offers a concluding prayer.

“Let us pray. O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.”
- The priest gives the blessing in the normal way and dismisses the people with: “Go in the peace of Christ.”

PHASE III: Public Masses with Minimal Limits on Public Gatherings and Limited Physical Distancing

In Phase III, there will not be limits on the size of gatherings. At risk individuals should be reminded of reasonable precautions against illness and practice social distancing. Mass and the Distribution would take place in the usual way before COVID-19.

Note: Guidance for bringing Holy Communion to a private is forthcoming from the Working Group on Infectious Disease Protocols for Sacraments & Pastoral Care of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

Note: These protocols cover the celebration of Mass, the Sacraments and Devotions. They do not cover parish meetings or social gatherings.