



## **Diocese of Fall River Guidelines for Safely Resuming Masses**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In order to open Churches for the celebration of Masses, pastors should follow all Massachusetts guidelines for safety and social distancing and be mindful of our own Catholic traditions for reverent celebration of the Mass and Sacraments. These guidelines will remain in force until further notice or changes by the Governor allow for or require revision. It is important to remember that these directives and guidelines are not intended to be permanent adjustments to normal practice but temporary responses to the epidemic. Reopening will not mean an immediate return to our practices prior to suspension of public Masses. Everyone's patience, understanding and cooperation will be needed and is appreciated.

Due to particular circumstances at each parish, the procedures for safe and reverent celebrations are left to the prudential judgment of the pastor. Charity and understanding are asked of all the faithful as parishes begin to celebrate public Masses. One parish may not be able to offer the same opportunities as a neighboring parish due to size, space limitations or other circumstances. In all cases, a pastor should communicate clearly and frequently with his parishioners about all procedures for communal celebrations.

### **WHEN:**

Public Celebration of Masses may resume on Saturday Evening, May 30th 2020, the Vigil of Pentecost. This will include the celebration of Funeral and Wedding Masses. Pastors are granted permission to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation on Catholic participants in the RCIA outside the Easter Season. Please contact my office when you feel the candidates are ready and the time is right to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for the young people. The celebration of the Sacraments will follow the same State guidelines as Masses.

### **WHO SHOULD ATTEND MASS:**

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will remain in effect until further notice. There are obvious potential risks to anyone attending Mass these days given the pandemic. Vulnerable, at-risk and otherwise concerned persons are encouraged to remain at home. Those who are feeling sick, or have any symptoms of illness must remain home. Pastors are encouraged to continue providing Masses online for those unable to attend.

Priests are encouraged to offer enough Masses on the weekends to allow as many people as possible in a given period to have the opportunity to attend Holy Mass and receive the Eucharist. Adjusted Mass schedules should be communicated with the faithful and posted online and on the doors of the Church. The bishop has given permission for priests to celebrate multiple Masses for pastoral concerns.

**In multi-church collaboratives and parishes, pastors are encouraged to use only one church to have Sunday Mass during this time, to ensure the safest implementation possible.**

#### **WHAT TO DO TO PREPARE:**

- Determine the amount of people that can be allowed in the Church building at one time according to the 40% and 6-foot rule, taking into consideration families who can sit together. **If you do not have your church capacity numbers available, please estimate by calculating the length of a pew, converting the length to inches and dividing by 30. This will give you an appropriate number of seats per pew. Multiply this number by the number of pews to calculate total capacity and multiply that number by 40% which gives the rough capacity number to comply with the State guideline.**
- Tape off alternating pews to allow for social distancing.
- Determine one entrance so that congregants can be counted, but encourage the use of all exits for the end of Mass. **Please be mindful of parishioners needing handicapped accessibility.**
- The Diocese has secured a bulk purchase of hand sanitizer that will be available to all parishes. **More information on pickup date, time and location to follow. Please see below for further cleaning guidelines.**
- All Holy Water fonts should remain empty.
- Remove all hymnals and missalettes.
- There will be no formal offertory collection during Mass at this time. Please provide collection baskets at the entrance of the Church.
- Determine means (on-line, telephone) for parishioners to pre-register for particular Masses:
- Information on a few possible tools for registration for Mass attendance will be made available to parishes the week of May 25th. Minimum requirements for the system would be:
  - o Ability to take registrations for a particular Mass up to a limit defined ahead of time by the parish based on their seating capacity.
  - o Ability to generate a confirmation email, which people would bring with them to Church.
  - o Consideration of the need for parish staff to take registrations by phone or by emails [as needed].

#### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES: SAFE AND REVERENT:**

**These guidelines are intended to assist pastors in maintaining both the safe and reverent celebrations of the Holy Mass that are in compliance with State regulations and our Catholic Tradition.**

- It may be necessary to appoint a hospitality volunteer to kindly ensure social distancing. Except for members of the same household, the faithful must always remain at least six feet apart during the Mass.
- Use of face masks/coverings is recommended by the CDC and mandated by the Governor of the Commonwealth, unless unable because of a medical condition or under the age 2. Priests and

liturgical ministers are not required to wear masks during the celebration of Mass, but are required to wear them [or a shield] during the distribution of Holy Communion.

- Masses should be of shorter duration. Time spent in proximity increases risk of transmission. For this reason, pastors and priest celebrants are asked to employ legitimate options as given in the Roman Missal to keep Masses to a shorter duration.
- Fully respectful of the very important role that music plays in our liturgies, and also respectful of the public health concerns, the congregation should be instructed not to sing, either by announcement or by signs. There can be a cantor and an instrumentalist, who would provide music during the Mass. Choirs should not be used during these days.
- Cantors need not wear a mask while singing, maintaining a safe distance from others.
- Altar servers are strongly discouraged.
- There should be no offertory procession of the gifts of bread and wine at this time.
- There is to be no Sign of Peace at this time. This can be replaced by a moment of quiet prayer or by wishing peace to each without physical contact.
- There is to be no distribution of the Precious Blood at this time.
- Sunday Masses can only be offered beginning at 4pm on Saturday through Midnight on Sunday and Sunday Masses cannot be offered on weekdays.
- Outdoor Masses are permitted if proper social distancing and State guidelines are followed.

### **The Liturgy of the Eucharist and the distribution of Holy Communion**

- Please make sure that all vessels are regularly purified and properly cleaned.
- Ciborium of hosts used for the faithful should remain covered or placed on a separate corporal towards the front of the altar.
- Priests are encouraged to use a paten with a single host for the celebrant on it.
- Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should use hand sanitizer before and after the distribution of Holy Communion.
- Priests and Extraordinary Ministers [if needed] must wear masks while they are distributing Holy Communion.
- Priests will be provided face shields for the distribution of Holy Communion. **More information on pickup date, time and location to follow.**
- Social distancing must be maintained during the Communion procession - single file  
Communion lines are encouraged but parishes with wide isles may be able to achieve adequate distancing.
- Holy Communion may be distributed at the normal time during the Mass or after the final blessing as they exit the church, in order to minimize closer contact.
- Masks and gloves must be removed when coming forward to receive Holy Communion and the Eucharist must be consumed immediately.
- Great care must be taken by ministers when distributing Holy Communion. Skin to skin contact should be carefully avoided. If contact is made, the priest or Extraordinary Minister should sanitize their hands before continuing distribution.
- During this period of health concern, in order to avoid a greater risk of contamination, communion should be given only in the hand and not on the tongue.

- If a priest has underlying health conditions or is otherwise unable, he may have Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion distribute in his place: “Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion” (*Ecclesia de Mysterio* 8.2). Members of the same household need not observe social distancing with one another during the Communion procession.
- Holy Communion is to be distributed by hand in the normal fashion. Ministers may not use gloves (or devices or instruments) to distribute Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion must be consumed after receiving and not taken away without consumption.

### Entrances and Exits

- Parishioners should sanitize their hands when they enter the church. If they can bring their own bottle of hand sanitizer to the church, they should. Otherwise, they can use sanitizer provided by the parish and positioned at the entry to the church. We have purchased a bulk supply of hand sanitizer. **More information on pickup date, time and location to follow.**
- All Mass attendees should wear masks when entering the church, unless they can claim a legitimate exemption. See State guidelines. The Diocese has purchased a bulk supply of disposable masks [limited availability]. **More information on pickup date, time and location to follow.**
- No bulletins or other literature will be handed out while entering the church. Parishes should make plans for sending bulletins out to their parishioners via the internet [if they have not already done so]. When possible, these bulletins should include the local advertisements that would normally be in the back of the bulletin in order to maintain a good relationship with local businesses that advertise in the bulletin.
- Churches should designate one place of entrance when possible (at least one entrance should be accessible) in order to control the number of people coming in. Once the maximum is reached, no one else can be allowed entrance. It will be difficult to turn parishioners away during this phase but the need to comply with the State guidelines is paramount. Door monitor(s) will be needed and the maximum number allowed must never be exceeded. [Maximum number includes the priest, ministers, livestream videographers and anyone else in the space during Mass.]
- When possible, entrance doors should be propped open as people enter so the faithful do not touch the handles or doors upon entering. They can be closed when Mass begins [if needed].
- Multiple exits should be used at the end of Mass to expedite departure and minimize chances of people encountering one another. In all cases, social distancing must be observed. Under no circumstances should any entrances be blocked from exiting.
- All hymnals, pew cards, bulletins, and other literature in the pews or near the doors should be removed.
- Celebrant must maintain social distance if greeting people after Mass.
- The faithful are encouraged not to congregate before or after Masses.
- Where possible, windows should be open to facilitate ventilation of the gathered space.

## Cleaning the Church

- Coronaviruses on surfaces and objects naturally die within hours to days. Warmer temperatures and exposure to sunlight will reduce the time the virus survives on surfaces and objects.
- Normal routine cleaning with soap and water removes germs and dirt from surfaces. It lowers the risk of spreading COVID-19 infection.
- Disinfectants kill germs on surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, you can further lower the risk of spreading infection. Following guidelines is an important part of reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Store and use disinfectants in a responsible and appropriate manner according to the label. Do not mix bleach or other cleaning and disinfection products together—this can cause fumes that may be very dangerous to breathe in.
- **Follow all manufacturer instructions when using any chemical cleaning agent, ESPECIALLY when using on wood surfaces. We want to avoid dangerous chemicals in the air as well as potential damage to pews and other surfaces.**
- Practice social distancing, wear facial coverings, and follow proper prevention hygiene, such as washing your hands frequently and using alcohol-based (at least 60% alcohol) hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.

Most surfaces and objects will just need normal routine cleaning. Frequently touched surfaces and objects (i.e. switches and doorknobs) will need to be cleaned and then disinfected to further reduce the risk of germs on surfaces and objects.

- First, clean the surface or object with soap and water.
- Then, disinfect using an appropriate cleaner.

**If your church, chapel, parish center/offices or school has been unoccupied for 7 days or more, it will only need normal routine cleaning to reopen the area. This is because the virus that causes COVID-19 has not been shown to survive on surfaces longer than this time.**

Examples of frequently touched surfaces and objects that will need routine cleaning and disinfecting following reopening are:

- Pews
  - Tables
  - Doorknobs
  - Light switches
  - Countertops
  - Handles
  - Cabinets
  - Keyboards
  - Toilets and handles
  - Faucets and sinks
- After they have been purified, Communion vessels should be washed with soap and water following each Mass.

## Check List: What needs to be in place before we start to have Mass?

- ✓ Church cleaned:
  - Pastors will need to organize volunteers to clean the pews and other common use areas, including restrooms, immediately after Mass.
  
- ✓ Hymnals and missalettes removed.
  
- ✓ Volunteers in place to assist with traffic flow.
  
- ✓ Signs clearly posted, letting people know:
  - They must wear masks.
  - Where they can sit.
  - No congregational singing (for now).
  
- ✓ Alternate pews blocked off.
  
- ✓ Hand sanitizer available.
  
- ✓ Holy water fonts empty.
  
- ✓ Markers on the floor indicating the direction of people flow.
  
- ✓ Some method in place to limit the number of people who enter the church to 40% capacity.
  
- ✓ Deans should plan to have regular conversations with Pastors as to how things are going during this first phase and report back to the Bishop or Vicar General as needed.