



Archdiocese of
Washington

**PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF MASS
AND HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE OF MASS**

14 May 2020

Revised 15 October 2020

OVERVIEW

Open to me the gates of holiness: I will enter and give thanks. This is the Lord's own gate where the just may enter. (Psalm 118:20)

This document is meant to assist our parishes and pastors and other communities in planning for the resumption of liturgies indoors. These guidelines cover only the beginning phases of a long process which we hope will lead to the full resumption of the liturgical life of our Church. Given the particular situations in different parishes, pastors should use discretion in the application of these guidelines.

Parishes and other communities should consider forming a task force to help create and implement these guidelines for their local circumstances. Each plan should include the following:

- Reconfiguration and indoor traffic plan for church/other indoor space to maintain social distancing
- Mass schedule for weekdays and Sundays based on current restrictions
- Strategy for scheduling attendance at Mass
- Plans for disinfecting worship space after each liturgy
- Strategy for training staff/volunteers
- Plans for communicating with parish community



I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation issued on March 12, 2020, is still in effect until further notice.
2. Good communication with parishioners is essential, starting before public celebrations resume. The method of determining attendance (e.g. sign-ups, lottery, etc.), the health and hygiene practices, the procedure for receiving Communion, etc. should be clearly communicated in advance of the first public Mass.
3. Even with the resumption of public liturgies, parishioners who are particularly vulnerable (e.g. over the age of sixty, existing heart or lung conditions, diabetes, or otherwise immuno-compromised) should be urged to remain home. Such individuals should not volunteer or be asked to volunteer to fulfill liturgical ministries. Likewise, parishioners who feel sick in any way and those with any form of fever or cough should be urged to refrain from public gatherings, including liturgical celebrations.
4. Liturgical celebrations should balance reverence with brevity. The Mass is always to be celebrated with fidelity to the Roman Missal and the requirements of liturgical law. However, pastors should also consider the importance of minimizing exposure time and reducing transmission risks while maintaining the solemnity and dignity of the celebration. This includes the minimal use of liturgical ministers and considerations for music.
5. Priests of the Archdiocese of Washington possess the faculty to celebrate Mass twice on weekdays for a good reason, and three times on Sundays or holy days if a pastoral need requires it. If a parish requires more Masses than its priests can celebrate, consideration should be given to requesting assistance from neighboring parishes, religious orders, or other priests within the Archdiocese. If you need assistance in finding a priest, you may contact the Office of Ministerial Leadership. In the case of necessity, Holy Communion may also be distributed outside of Mass as described below in the document (see Section V on page 14 of this document).



II. HEALTH AND HYGIENE CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Revised Guideline:** All liturgical celebrations should observe limitations on gathering sizes and ensure social distancing. These limitations are still being set by each jurisdiction and we will continue to communicate any updates as jurisdictions move into future reopening phases. Members of the same household may sit together, but there should be at least 6 feet of separation otherwise. Ministers may greet members of the assembly as they arrive and/or depart from the church. However, wearing masks and physical distancing must be observed and congregating outside of the church building should not be encouraged.
2. All members of the assembly and all ministers, except the priest-celebrant, are to wear face coverings at all times while in church (the process of receiving Holy Communion will be discussed later). The priest-celebrant is *permitted* to wear a covering during Mass but not *required* except during the distribution of Communion.
3. All members of the assembly and all ministers are to sanitize their hands upon entering the church. Parishes should consider providing hand sanitizer but may also ask the faithful to bring their own.
4. Pews and other surfaces in the church are to be regularly and thoroughly disinfected. Indoor air ventilation and circulation is to be maximized to the extent possible. As much as possible, doors are to be propped open, at least at times of entry and departure, to minimize contact with door handles or push bars. Ushers (with face coverings and gloves) may be used to minimize contact with door handles by opening doors when necessary.



III. GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING

Scheduling

1. Pastors may wish to use an online platform to allow people to sign up to attend Masses, or assign Masses according to last names or some other system. Whatever means are utilized should be clearly communicated to parishioners.
2. Plans should be developed for situations in which more people are seeking to attend a Mass than can be permitted under the limitations on gathering.
3. If several Masses are scheduled on the same day, enough time is to be allowed between Masses to allow for sanitizing surfaces, for air to be refreshed through ventilation and circulation, and for worship aids to be disposed of and replaced. This might take two to three hours, which may be more than a parish's normal amount of time available between Masses.
4. Consideration may be given to the use of other available venues (e.g. parish hall) for Masses, especially if this would allow for the sanitizing of other venues also in use. In this case, any table used as an altar should be dignified; chairs should be plastic or metal rather than cloth and thus more easily wiped down; and the arrangement of the space should maintain social distancing. All directives and recommendations in this document remain in force.

Preparation of the Congregation

1. For the safety and well-being of parishioners, especially the most vulnerable, pastors should communicate to their communities the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control regarding participation in public gatherings. This applies to those attending Mass and volunteers. Pastors may consider starting simply, perhaps by offering one public Mass the first day it is allowed, and then increasing the number of Masses. Minimizing the risk of community spread in our churches is essential to keeping people safe and in keeping our churches open for the celebration of public Mass.
2. Parishioners are to be informed *well in advance*—even for days or weeks—of the special measures that will be taken during the Mass, to include:
 - a. the need to wear face coverings in the church and to sanitize their hands upon entering the church;



- b. the need to maintain social distancing at all times, including in the pews;
 - c. the procedure for taking up the collection and the necessity that no one touch a basket that may be offered;
 - d. the procedure for receiving Holy Communion—including precise instructions on how to remove and replace their facial covering (see “Instructions for receiving Holy Communion” below) –and the routes to be taken to and from the sanctuary during the Communion rite;
 - e. the procedure and routes for departing from the church (including dismissal by pews).
3. To the extent possible and within reason, parishioners should be encouraged to minimize the use of restrooms, since these must be sanitized after every use. Signs may be posted to remind congregants of this necessity.

Preparation of Ministers

1. Ministers should be thoroughly briefed on the contents of this document and the strict necessity to maintain social distancing and safety for all participants in the Mass.
2. **Revised Guideline:** Care should be taken in utilizing lay ministers (readers, altar servers, sacristans and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion) in the sanctuary to ensure proper social distancing throughout Mass. Altar servers may be employed with the permission of their parents, and must wear masks at all times. Please be understanding if a lay minister is not yet comfortable to serve.
3. Permanent deacons should discuss with their pastor’s particular circumstances such as age, pre-existing conditions, secular employment, or family health situations that may limit their participation in parish liturgical ministry.
4. Ushers should be limited to the number actually needed, given the size and layout of the church. Ushers must wear face coverings and follow all social distancing precautions.



5. **Revised Guideline:** Musical accompaniment at Mass may employ a cantor and organist or pianist. Small musical ensembles, e.g. trios or quartets are also permitted. However, the decision on whether to use a small ensemble must factor in the need for enhanced social distancing (greater than 6 feet) from each other and as separate as possible from the congregation. The decision on whether to use a choir loft should take into account the size of the nave and its relationship to the loft. If the ensemble and/or cantor is located in front of the congregation, enhanced social distancing must be observed and/or the use of plastic barriers. Hymns and sung Mass parts by a cantor or small ensemble is allowed, but singing by the congregation remains prohibited.

Preparation of the Church

1. Baptismal fonts and holy water stoups are to remain empty until further notice.
2. Hymnals, missalettes, and other worship aids are to be removed from pews. If the use of worship aids cannot be avoided, they should be disposable, used only once, and then discarded. Likewise, printed bulletins are not to be distributed; digital bulletins can be posted on parish web sites or sent by e-mail.
3. Seating arrangements in the sanctuary should maintain social distancing.
4. Signs or markers on pews, walls, and floors can help to ensure that proper distancing is maintained. Such signs and markers should be dignified in appearance.
5. **Revised Guideline:** Routes of liturgical processions that are not socially distanced from the congregation are allowed, provided the amount of time when social distancing does not occur is minimal. For example, entrance/recessional processions down a center aisle are allowed even if they briefly come close to the congregation.
6. Routes for people approaching to receive communion, and then returning to their pews, should be established and clearly marked to help maintain social distancing. (These may be very different from the routes to which people are accustomed.)
7. Parishes should continue live-streaming services and, insofar as possible, continue ministry to those who are sick or homebound.



A Quick Checklist

Pastors should consider the following matters as they plan for the implementation of these directives:

1. What method will the parish use to determine attendance? How will the parishioners sign up, and how will they be notified?
2. Does the parish have enough cleaning supplies to clean the church and other areas between Masses? What will be the procedures for cleaning the church and other areas (including the sanctuary, the sacristy, pews, surfaces, restrooms, etc.)? How long will it take to clean between Masses?
3. Given the above considerations, how many Masses are possible in a day? What additional space is available for use? Are there enough priests to meet this need?
4. Is the church properly prepared, with necessary signage in place? Do all routes for ministers and congregants maintain sufficient social distancing? Have all hymnals, missalettes, and other worship aids been removed?



IV. PARTICULAR GUIDANCE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

Introductory Rites

1. With due respect for the solemn nature of the liturgy, pastors should consider selecting a shorter option for the Penitential Act itself or for the sung setting of the Kyrie.
2. With due respect for the solemn nature of the liturgy, pastors should consider reciting the Gloria or selecting a shorter sung setting.
3. The priest could place the missal on a stand at the chair or even on the altar when he recites the presidential prayers, rather than having a server hold the book.

Liturgy of the Word

1. Ministers are to maintain social distancing as they approach or leave the ambo.
2. A Deacon who asks for the blessing from the Priest-celebrant is to maintain social distancing.

Prayer of the Faithful – Universal Prayer

1. The Prayer of the Faithful is encouraged, especially on Sundays and in livestreamed Masses. Pastors are encouraged to limit the number of petitions to four (for the needs of the Church; for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; for the local community) and to aim for brevity in each petition.
2. That being said, the Prayer of the Faithful may fittingly include petitions for those impacted by the coronavirus and those who cannot be present at the Mass.



Preparation of the Altar and Gifts

1. All ministers, including the Priest-celebrant, are to disinfect their hands before preparing the altar and gifts.
2. The number of ministers preparing the altar and gifts is to be kept to a minimum and social distancing is to be maintained; thus vessels, cruets, etc., should not be handed directly to the Priest-celebrant or Deacon.
3. If the Priest-celebrant elects not to wear a face covering during Mass, then the ciboria for the congregation should be placed on a corporal away from the celebrant's paten and covered with lids or palls. Chalices for concelebrating Priests, for Deacons, or for the gluten intolerant (if these are used) should be covered with palls until the reception of Communion.
4. The Priest-celebrant may wash his hands himself at the side of the altar, using the vessels and towel placed there before the start of Mass or during the preparation of the altar.
5. The presentation of the gifts by members of the assembly is to be omitted.
6. A collection may be taken up, but baskets are not to be passed and social distancing is to be maintained.
7. Baskets with long handles may be used by ushers if proper social distancing (six feet) can be maintained.
8. Baskets or other appropriate receptacles may also be placed at the entrances of the church, and an announcement may be made at an appropriate time directing attention to them (such as parishioners could drop their offertory in the basket or receptacle as they exit the church). An usher, who maintains social distancing, can assist with this process.

Lord's Prayer

1. The practice of holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is strictly prohibited.

Sign of Peace

1. The invitation, "Let us offer each other the sign of peace," and the exchange of peace that follows, are to be omitted until further notice.



Fraction of the Bread

1. At the time of the ritual fractioning, the Priest-celebrant should avoid touching consecrated Hosts that will be distributed to members of the assembly.

Communion Rite

1. Each Priest and Deacon is to consume the Precious Blood from separate chalices. (Note that while the Deacon here has his own chalice, he must be given his chalice by the Priest-celebrant; he is not permitted to communicate himself.) Each is to purify the chalice he uses.
2. Immediately after consuming the Sacrament, the Priest-celebrant and Deacon are to disinfect their hands, even if they do not distribute Communion.
3. If the Priest-celebrant has elected not to wear a face covering during Mass, he must put on a face covering for the distribution of Communion.
4. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the laity is suppressed until further notice unless their celiac disease is so severe; then it is left to pastors to determine how to handle, perhaps by consecrating a separate chalice.
5. **Revised Guideline:** Use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to distribute Holy Communion is permitted without reservation. Like ordinary ministers, extraordinary ministers must wear a mask and must sanitize their hands before distributing Communion. The practice of self-communication (i.e., a communicant taking a host from the ciborium instead of receiving from a minister) remains prohibited.
6. A small table is to be placed next to each station for distribution. On each table is to be placed a corporal, a purificator, and a hand sanitizer.
7. If the minister of Communion touches the hand of a communicant, or if a communicant receives on the tongue, the minister is to place the ciborium on the corporal on the nearby table, taking care not to touch the ciborium with the hand used for distribution. The minister then removes any particles from his fingers using the purificator and thoroughly disinfects his hands before continuing with distribution.



8. Instructions for receiving Holy Communion (which can be used to communicated to parishioners using these or similar words):
- a. All Catholics present who are in a state of grace are invited to receive Communion at this time.
 - b. Those who have health concerns and do not wish to receive sacramental Communion may make an Act of Spiritual Communion [which can be found in your worship aid / which will be led by __ before / after the distribution of Communion].
 - c. Those who will not receive communion should not come forward with hands crossed for a blessing; there is a blessing for everyone at the end of Mass.
 - d. Children who will not receive communion but who are old enough to remain quietly in their pew should do so, and not get in the line for Communion.
 - e. When you approach for Communion, please remain six feet from others in the line and from the minister. When it is your time to receive, keep your mask on and remain six feet away from the minister while he shows the Host and says, The Body of Christ. After you respond, Amen, approach the minister.
 - f. Place one hand under the other while keeping your fingers together, making “a throne for the King,” as St. Cyril of Jerusalem says. Receive the Host in your hand, then step six feet away from the minister. Then carefully loosen your facial covering (or mask by an ear loop), consume the Host, and replace the facial covering. If the minister accidentally touches anyone’s hand, he will immediately disinfect his own hands.
 - g. Those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue are asked to [go to a particular minister / wait until the end of Communion / etc.] to help us accommodate this preference. Although each person retains the right to receive on the tongue, the Centers for Disease Control have recommended against it; but more importantly, out of love for our brothers and sisters, and out of kind concern for the vulnerable and our sacred ministers, those who normally receive on the tongue are respectfully asked to consider receiving in the hand as a temporary measure. It is a legitimate practice attested to in our Catholic Tradition since the ancient Church. The minister will immediately disinfect his hands after each communicant who receives on the tongue, even if no physical contact is made.



9. After the distribution of Communion is complete, all ministers of Communion are to disinfect their hands.
10. After the distribution of Communion is complete, the Priest-celebrant may set aside the face covering on a separate table which should be disinfected before and after each Mass.
11. With due reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ and due respect for the sacred vessels, purification may take place after Mass, to ensure careful and sanitary purification.

Prayer After Communion

1. Prior to the Prayer after Communion, according to the needs of the gathered assembly or if live-streaming is taking place, a minister may lead an Act of Spiritual Communion for those who are present but, out of concern for their safety, did not receive sacramental Communion or for those who are watching via livestream. The Act of Spiritual Communion may also be led by a minister prior to the distribution of Communion.

Final Blessing and Dismissal

1. Pastors should consider having the congregation dismissed by rows, under the supervision of ushers, to avoid crowding at the exits of the church.
2. Doors should be propped open to avoid unnecessary contact with door handles and pushbars.



V. HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE OF MASS

When it is not possible to celebrate a public Mass to provide the Eucharist to a congregation (especially due to the restriction on the number of Masses allowed to be celebrated by a priest in a day) it is possible to use the “Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass,” found in Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.

1. An ordinary minister of Communion must preside at this liturgy. He is to decide whether the longer or the shorter form of the rite is to be used.
2. The directives for public celebrations of Mass given above apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to public celebrations of Holy Communion outside of Mass.
3. In all celebrations, a brief instruction is to be given, to include at least a brief catechesis on the essential connection between the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion. The following are excerpts from the Introduction to Holy Communion outside Mass, nos. 14-15:
 - a. It is proper that those who are prevented from being present at the community’s celebration [of the Mass] should be refreshed with the Eucharist. In this way they may realize that they are united not only with the Lord’s Sacrifice but also with the community itself and are supported by the love of their brothers and sisters.
 - b. When [the faithful] receive Communion outside Mass, they are closely united with the sacrifice which perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross. They are sharers in the sacred banquet in which by communion in the Body and Blood of the Lord the people of God shares in the blessings of the Paschal Sacrifice, renews the New Covenant once made by God with men in the Blood of Christ, and by faith and hope prefigures and anticipates the eschatological banquet in the kingdom of the Father, proclaiming the Death of the Lord until he comes.
4. If the presider is vulnerable to infection and no other ordinary minister is able to assist, he may ask an extraordinary minister to carry out the act of distributing Communion.
5. Communion may be distributed outside Mass, only within the rites provided in the liturgical books Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass and Pastoral Care of the Sick.

