



**Very Reverend Daniel B. Carson**

Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia

Dear Brother Priest,

I write today to provide you with updates. I will continue to keep you informed as we navigate this challenging time.

### **Updated Covid-19 Liturgical Guidelines**

**May 20, 2021**

The following revisions modify the “Public Celebration of Mass and Holy Communion Outside of Mass” guidelines issued May 14, 2020 and revised October 15, 2020. These modifications take into account the following:

- The increasing percentage of residents who have received the vaccination, particularly those in the age demographic who are at highest risk of contracting Covid-19;
- The low positivity rate and declining hospitalization rates locally;
- The recent Executive Orders by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan on March 9, 2021 lifting capacity restrictions in houses of worship along with his May 14, 2021 Order revising the State mandate regarding wearing masks indoors; and the corresponding Executive Order by District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser, dated May 17, 2021;
- The recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding the cleaning and disinfection of public spaces, the recommended social distancing of 3 feet in K-12 schools, and the lifting of certain restrictions for fully vaccinated people;
- The continuing guidance and orders from State and local health departments regarding masking, cleaning, and social distancing.

Based upon the above, below are the updated revisions to the “Public Celebration of Mass and Holy Communion Outside of Mass” guidelines. Please note that these guidelines are also applicable to other parish liturgical events such as weddings, funerals and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

### **Health and Hygiene Considerations**

- Liturgical celebrations no longer need to abide by capacity restrictions, except for Montgomery County where a 75% capacity restriction is in place (which is set to expire on May 28 when the county will follow the other jurisdictions).
- The use of masks while gathered indoors is not required for fully vaccinated individuals and is recommended for non-vaccinated individuals, except for: (1) Prince George's County, which still requires masks to be worn indoors by vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals; and (2) Montgomery County, which requires masks to be worn indoors by non-vaccinated individuals (which is set to expire on May 28 when the county will follow the other jurisdictions). There is no requirement to check vaccination status.
- The use of masks by ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion while distributing Holy Communion, vaccinated and non-vaccinated, is still required during the distribution.
- Social distancing is still required between individuals from separate households for indoor gatherings. However, pastors are permitted to reduce this social distancing to 3 feet for indoor celebrations (which may allow the use of all rows) if they feel it would be beneficial. Pastors may choose to set aside a section of the church that maintains 6-foot distancing for those who wish to maintain more social distancing. Please note that Montgomery County still maintains a 6-foot social distancing mandate between individuals from different households, which is set to expire on May 28.
- Parishes are to continue to have hand sanitizer available at all of the entrance of churches.
- Cleaning and disinfecting after every liturgical celebration is no longer required unless a person with a confirmed or suspected Covid-19 case is known to have been in an indoor space, per CDC guidelines, cleaning with ordinary soap and water once per day is sufficient to remove viruses that may be on surfaces and help maintain a healthy facility. However, such shared indoor spaces must be disinfected at least once a week in addition to being cleaned once a day. If a person with a positive Covid-19 case is known to have been in an indoor space, cleaning and disinfection must occur immediately.

## **Preparation of Ministers**

Musical accompaniment at Mass or other liturgical celebrations may employ a cantor and organist or pianist, or even a small musical ensemble of no more than 4 singers. However, the decision on whether to use a small ensemble must factor in the need for enhanced social distancing (greater than 3 feet) from each other and as separate as possible from the congregation. 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 are allowed.

## **Preparation of the Church**

- Baptismal fonts and Holy Water stoups may be used. Hand sanitizer must be available in close proximity to permit the cleansing of hands. Fonts and stoups are to be cleaned regularly, following proper protocols for handling Holy Water.
- Hard copy bulletins and other printed liturgical materials may be used.

## **Guidance for the Celebration of Mass**

- Procession at the beginning of Mass and recession at the end of Mass may be restored.
- The celebrant is welcome to greet the parishioners after Mass, but shaking hands should be avoided.
- The offertory Procession of the Gifts may be restored.
- The Sign of Peace should be restored with the use of a gesture, such as a bow or wave, but shaking of hands should be avoided.
- The distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended until further notice.
- The use of masks while distributing Holy Communion is still required (as noted earlier), as is the requirement to sanitize one's hands prior to the distribution of Holy Communion and if one's hand touches the hand of the communicant. Holy Communion on the tongue continues to be discouraged, but pastors may make provisions for those who would like to receive on the tongue (the use of separate lines, receiving at the end of the communion line, etc.). If a minister distributes Holy Communion on the tongue, he or she should still sanitize his or her hands after the distribution to each individual on the tongue.

**Please note: The Bishops of the region will be meeting to discuss additional modifications that will be communicated to you within the next week.**

## **Remind the Faithful of Information on the Website**

The archdiocesan website is updated regularly. Please see [adw.org/coronavirus](https://adw.org/coronavirus) for information related to the coronavirus, [adw.org/live-streamed-masses-and-prayers/](https://adw.org/live-streamed-masses-and-prayers/) for a listing of live stream Masses and prayers, and [cathstan.org](https://cathstan.org) and [elpreg.org](https://elpreg.org) for the *Catholic Standard* and the Spanish-language *El Pregonero* newspapers.

As always, should you have questions or need assistance from my office and the Pastoral Center, please let us know.

With gratitude for your priestly ministry, I am  
Sincerely in Christ,  
Very Reverend Daniel B. Carson  
Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia

