

Diocese of Scranton
**Detailed Liturgical Norms for
Yellow and Green Phases with Gradual Re-Opening**

Updated September 11, 2020



The following protocols pertain to all churches in the 11 counties of the Diocese of Scranton.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, parishes must adhere to all health and safety protocols that have been established for Masses. Policies including wearing face masks, maintaining proper six foot social distancing and proper hand hygiene remain non-negotiable and are fundamentally rooted in protecting all people in our parishes and maintaining the health and safety of our community.

ACCESS TO CHURCHES FOR PRIVATE, INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

- Parishes can be open for individual, private prayer. Hours and times can be determined by Pastor or Parish Life Coordinator and communicated to parishioners.
- All general prevention protocols for signage, distancing of six feet, sanitization, and restricting persons with symptoms must be followed.
- If a Church is unable to reasonably sanitize or maintain CDC authorized numbers of visitors for prayer, it should be closed immediately.
- People who visit a church for private, individual prayer should wear masks and could be asked to follow any necessary directions regarding designated entrances and exits to help with social distancing.

STATUS OF PUBLIC MASSES AND OTHER EVENTS

- The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended at this time.
- Public Masses in diocesan parishes, worship sites, college campuses, chapels and healthcare facilities may take place provided they follow these directives and adhere to social distancing limitations.
- People who are at risk because of an underlying health issue or who are elderly or infirm are strongly encouraged to stay home, for their own health, and to avoid any risk of contracting the virus.
- All guidelines and sanitization procedures for before, during and after Mass must be followed. **The reopening of parishes and resuming public Masses is dependent on a parish's readiness to execute the proper sanitization procedures and liturgical directives.**
- Parishes may schedule public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours or devotional prayers but any attendance must observe social distancing limits and, given the desire of the faithful to attend, a reservation system may have to be implemented for attendees.
- Outdoor Masses are permitted but proper social distancing must be maintained and face masks must also be worn. As cooler weather arrives, parishes will need to address how long Masses can be held outdoors for the comfort and safety of parishioners. For people that may still feel uncomfortable with going to Mass indoors, parishes may continue to livestream Masses for people in their cars and offer the distribution of Holy Communion in the parking lot at the conclusion of Mass.
- Parishes may use any additional space available to them as overflow areas in which to pro-

vide livestream Mass broadcasts if the church reaches its capacity with social distancing. If overflow space is used, it is important that proper social distancing is maintained as well and sanitization procedures take place. Also, parishes must pay particular attention to entrance and exit procedures from both the church and additional worship space to avoid large numbers of people congregating.

- Parishes should continue to livestream Masses and other events to optimize the number of people who can participate.

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER MASS (*much of this applies to any public devotions*)

Pastors/Parish Life Coordinators are to see that these obligations are enforced without exception.

BEFORE:

- As people arrive at Mass, provide clear directions about what is expected, what the protocols will be, and what they need to do to be prepared. Signage should also be posted at the entrance of the church emphasizing:
Each member of the faithful will need to wear a mask.
- The faithful should be encouraged to bring disinfectant wipes to assist with sanitizing the areas they occupy.
- They should be advised to check their temperature at home, and to remain at home if they are experiencing any symptoms.
- Additional Masses can be added during the week to increase the number of people who can attend weekly. Thankfully, week-after-week, more faithful are feeling comfortable returning to Mass. As we continue to welcome everyone back to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, parishes have been asked to resume their full schedule of weekend Masses by October.
- Appropriate cleaning of high-use areas within the church is to be done before and after each Mass.
- Pews utilized by any person must be wiped down with disinfectant
- Restroom facilities and door handles, push plates and knobs, are to be sanitized after each Mass.
- Floors and seating in the pews must be marked with appropriate social distance of six feet between individuals or family members of the same households. This will mean several pews are to be left vacant between congregants.
- Remove any hymnals or missalettes from the pews and store until the pandemic has passed.
- Holy water fonts are to remain empty.
- Hand sanitizer is to be made available throughout the church when possible.
- All liturgical ministers and ushers should wear masks and practice very diligent hand-washing and social distancing.

DURING:

- The limit of people present for all Masses (indoor) includes the priest, deacon, lector, musician, extraordinary minister if they are present. Altar servers are not to be used at this time. There is also no need for choirs to participate in Masses during this phase.
- Determination should be made as to the liturgical ministers who will be in the sanctuary respecting social distancing.
- Parishioners enter through designated door, take assigned seating pre-arranged for distancing, follow guidance regarding the line for communion, and exit by a different designated door. Entry doors are to be propped or held open before Mass and exit doors are to be propped or held open at the end of Mass to prevent people from touching the door handles, knobs or push plates.
- Pastors should utilize the short form of readings and offer brief homilies as a way to shorten the duration of Mass.
- The Offertory procession and sign of peace are suspended.
- The collection is taken only at a stationary, secured basket or lock box. The collection box should be monitored by ushers until the donations are collected and handled according to the proper protocols in place for handling collections.
- Only the priest and deacon are to distribute Communion. If there is an issue with a vulnerable priest or deacon, an extraordinary minister of Communion may assist.
- Priests and deacons (and any other ministers) must wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion and are to use hand sanitizer prior to, immediately after, and, if necessary, during the distribution if contact is made with the communicant's hand or tongue. Gloves are not to be worn during the Communion distribution.
- **It is highly recommended that the distribution of Holy Communion take place AFTER the conclusion of Mass.** This should be explained to the faithful beforehand and that social distancing must be observed in forming a procession to receive Communion. The exceptions for the distribution of Communion after Mass are First Holy Communion Masses, Confirmations and Funerals.
- After receiving Communion, the faithful are to depart and not return to their pews.
- Communicants may make their prayer of thanksgiving once they leave the church.
- The communicants are to follow the usher's directions and floor markings through this whole process.
- Ushers assist with maintaining distance in communion line. Parishioners remain masked until just before their turn to receive, and then return the mask.
- Parishioners are to be strongly advised to receive the Body of Christ in the hand, in keeping with the guidance of health professionals, to avoid the chance of spreading contagion to priests or other parishioners from contact with saliva.
- If a communicant approaches and wishes to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, they should not be refused. However, the priest or deacon **MUST** sanitize his hands prior to giving Holy Communion to the next person.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended at this time.

AFTER:

- Exit is guided by the trained volunteers and there should be no interactions held with clergy or other ministers.
- Many parishes have been successfully communicating with parishioners via email, social media and various apps, as opposed to printing and distributing bulletins. If a parish needs to use printed bulletins to communicate, that is permissible, but should be left in an easily accessible area and not hand-distributed by an usher or other church volunteer.
- Parishioners are not to gather or socialize in any manner (for example, coffee and donuts), but should proceed directly to their cars.
- Pews and other high-traffic areas of the church are to be immediately wiped down before the next Mass, along with the removal of any trash or other items in pews.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO INVITE PARISHIONERS BACK TO MASS

- It will be the responsibility of each parish to develop a system that adequately allows the faithful to gather, in a way that works best for the pastor and parish staff and meets all requirements stated in these guidelines.
- No parishioner should expect to attend Mass on a daily or regular basis.
- A parish may consider establishing a reservation system for Mass attendance for both weekday and weekend services. Parishioners could call or email the parish office if they are interested in attending (similar to a restaurant reservation system).
- While it remains up to a parish whether a reservation system is needed for Mass, please continue to make every effort to ensure that no worshipper is turned away at the door. Whether using additional space and livestream opportunities or communion distribution after Mass, we must make every effort to be accommodating to our people.
- Parishes in close proximity are encouraged to work together if social distancing limitations begin to limit capacity in any way. No parish should mandate that an individual must join their parish in order to make a reservation for Mass.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- The Sacrament of Penance will be made available to people. Individual confession is the ordinary manner of celebrating the Sacrament. Communal Penance Services are prohibited at this time.
- As always, the priest should take great care to ensure that the conversation with the penitent remains absolutely confidential.
- A priest can establish an area for confessions in an open area of the church or church hall, or a Reconciliation room with adequate space for distancing.
- A church rectory cannot be used for confessions.

- A priest confessor and the penitent should both wear a mask since by nature confession occurs in a close setting.
- Confessions outside of the church may be offered - penitents remain in their cars with the car window open while the priest hears their confession from a six-foot distance.
- Proper sanitization of any areas or surfaces touched by penitent is necessary after each confession.
- The Sacrament of Penance cannot be celebrated by cell phone, FaceTime, Zoom or any other video conferencing technology. Cell phones and any other electronic devices (with the exception of a hearing aid) should also not be used to amplify the voice of either the confessor or penitent.
- Even though the Sacrament of Penance is available, the faithful are encouraged to follow the directives of the Holy See regarding perfect contrition.
- General Absolution is not permitted at this time.

SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK/PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK

- Individual Anointing of the Sick remains permissible, but not communal celebrations.
- Mindful of the restrictions at all area hospitals and nursing facilities, the priest should adhere to a facility's policy.
- In a hospital, priests should use all Personal Protective Equipment that is provided.
- A doctor or nurse may not anoint a person if the priest is unable to enter the patient's room. In this case, only the prayers, Apostolic Pardon, and blessing may be given.
- For an Anointing of the Sick in a home, priests should practice meticulous handwashing. Face masks and gloves must be worn, and a cotton swab used to anoint the sick person with the Oil of the Sick. The cotton swab should be properly disposed of through burning or burying. Use hand sanitizer after the anointing, and upon returning home, remove and launder your clothes and take a warm shower.
- Extraordinary ministers of Communion are only permitted to take Communion to the homebound/hospitals/nursing homes in the "green phase." Face masks must be worn and hand sanitizer must be used prior to and after giving Holy Communion.

SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

- The *Order for Celebrating Matrimony within and without Mass* is permitted.
- The maximum of people allowed inside church to attend a wedding includes the priest, any musicians and photographers.
- All wedding guests (not bride and groom) must follow social distancing guidelines, unless they are immediate family living under one roof.
- All guidance from before, during and after Mass must be followed. (see pages 2-3)
- For the "Celebration of Matrimony," the priest should stand behind the altar and the bride

and groom should stand in front of the altar, to allow for social distancing.

- The wedding rings should not be handled by others (ring bearer, maid of honor, best man) prior to the wedding couple giving them to each other.
- The faithful must wear masks during the service.
- There should be no receiving line or gatherings at the conclusion of the ceremony. Guests must depart using social distancing.
- If any type of program is to be used at the wedding, each guest must get their own individual copy and must be responsible for taking it with them upon leaving.
- Priests, Deacons and Parish Life Coordinators are encouraged to speak with each couple in advance to share this relevant information.
- Even if a wedding date is scheduled while a couple is in the “yellow phase,” if a particular county or region regresses into the “red phase,” the restrictions of that phase may require further postponement.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

- Communal baptisms are not allowed at this time. The Sacrament of Baptism is permitted only for one child at a time, unless those to be baptized are immediate family members.
- Social distancing and group size guidelines are still applicable during Baptism.
- The priest or deacon and the faithful should wear a mask for the entire Baptism.
- The priest or deacon should recite the *Ephpheta* Prayer, but should not touch the child’s mouth or ears as called for in the *Order of Celebrating Baptism*.
- Fresh water should be used for each baptism and then discarded. The Baptismal font should be sanitized after each Baptism.
- A priest or deacon may use cotton swabs to apply the Oil of Catechumens and the Sacred Chrism.
- All guidance from before, during and after Mass must be followed. (see pages 2-3)

FUNERALS

- Funeral services, including funeral Masses, wakes and viewings may resume with families and guests, so long as they don’t exceed the social distancing limit and those gathered abide by social distancing requirements.
- A funeral Mass for a COVID-19 parishioner is permitted. The casket should be closed prior to entering the church.
- Parishes should inform funeral directors of current church social distancing limit, the liturgical guidelines for funerals, and coordinate procedures such as encouraging members of the same household to sit together, social distancing for the arrival and departure, reception of Holy Communion etc.
- Family and friends of the deceased should be seated in church first before bringing the cas-

ket or urn inside. Appropriate social distance between members of the same households is to be respected, especially when entering and leaving church.

- It is recommended that the Introductory Rites of the Funeral Mass (Sprinkling with Holy Water, Placing of the Pall, Placing of the Christian Symbols) take place after everyone has been seated in church and the casket/urn is placed at the foot of the sanctuary.
- It is encouraged to have members of the same household place the pall on the casket.
- All guidance from before, during and after Mass must be followed, including the omission of the Offertory Procession. (see pages 2-3)
- Since the procession to the cemetery usually follows the funeral, it is recommended that the distribution of Holy Communion take place within the Mass. Appropriate social distancing during the reception of Holy Communion at funerals will need to be coordinated by the parish and the funeral director.
- The priest should wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion and the Final Commendation. The faithful should wear masks.
- The pall is to be removed from the casket by the funeral director before processing down the aisle and out of church.
- Memorial Masses for individuals who died during the stay-at-home orders may also take place as long as the number of people who gather does not exceed the established limits. Live streaming of these services is a possibility, if the family desires, to allow others attend remotely.
- The use of cemetery chapels for final committal services remains suspended.

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION (ELECT AND CANDIDATES)

- The Elect who did not receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil may be initiated by their pastor if they are comfortable with returning to church.
- Special consideration should be given to offer these sacraments during a Sunday livestream Mass so that members of the parish community can participate virtually.
- Only one member of the Elect or Candidate can receive the Sacraments of Initiation at a given Mass, unless they are members of the same household.
- An individual Mass with the Elect's family, sponsor and the parish R.C.I.A. director can also be scheduled as long as the capacity does not exceed the attendance limit.

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

- Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators may decide when to reschedule the parish's First Holy Communion on an individual or "small group" basis, with the expressed permission of the parents and following attendance limits set for this phase. These celebrations may take place at a weekend or a weekday Mass and may be livestreamed for the parish to participate.

- All guidance from before, during and after Mass must be followed. (see pages 2-3)
- For the Renewal of Baptismal Promises, the First Communion candidates should not bless themselves with holy water from the Baptismal Font nor should holy water be sprinkled on them.
- The priest should wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion. The faithful should wear a mask while in attendance.
- Family members are discouraged from remaining in the church to take photographs.

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION (ADULT AND 8TH GRADE)

- Although Pastors and Sacramental Ministers have already been granted the faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil or on Pentecost, given the current circumstances, this faculty is extended beyond Pentecost to the end of the Liturgical year on Saturday, November 28, 2020.
- Pastors or sacramental ministers may offer an individual Confirmation Mass that does not exceed the established limits for attendance.
- All guidance from before, during and after Mass must be followed. (see pages 2-3)
- A pastor or sacramental minister may use Confirmation within Mass or without Mass.
- **Priests should use cotton balls or cotton swabs for the Anointing with Chrism during the Sacrament of Confirmation in their parishes.** Each cotton ball or swab used is to be set aside after anointing each candidate, and either burned or buried in an appropriate location after the Confirmation. With the use of cotton balls or swabs, there is no need for the priest to sanitize his hand after each anointing, unless for some reason his hand made contact with the candidate. While the use of gloves during the anointing is left to the discretion of the priest, sanitization is still recommended if his hand has made contact with the candidate, in order to avoid cross-contamination.
- The practice of having the Confirmation sponsor accompany the candidate and placing his or her hand on the candidate's shoulder for the Anointing with Chrism is suspended at this time. The Confirmation sponsor is to remain in his or her pew during the Anointing and offers prayers for the candidate who is about to receive this sacrament.
- The reception of Holy Communion should take place within the Confirmation Mass.
- The priest should wear a mask for the Anointing and the Distribution of Holy Communion. The faithful should wear a mask while in attendance.
- Family members are discouraged from remaining in the church to take photographs.