

Diocese of Scranton  
**Detailed Liturgical Norms for  
Public Masses During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Updated November 24, 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 and Masses on holy days 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 continuance of a parish's ability to hold public Masses is dependent on the 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 cold 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 provide 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 were asked to resume their full schedule of weekend Masses in 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
- Parishes should ensure that all heating and ventilation systems operate properly. As is feasible, parishes should continue to ensure adequate fresh air supply for all facilities through the mechanical system and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, even if slightly during the winter months. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk to children using the facility.
- 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:**

- In response to an updated masking order by the Pennsylvania Health Department on November 17, 2020 – priests, deacons, lectors and cantors are now able and encouraged to wear masks throughout the celebration of Mass, including when they are carrying out their particular role in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. At minimum, masks **MUST** be worn during the distribution of Holy Communion, whenever entering or leave the sanctuary, or anytime there is close contact with another liturgical minister or parishioner.
- To the greatest extent possible, the priest and other ministers (deacon, lectors, and musicians) should maintain a six-foot distance from each other at all times in the sanctuary. All ministers should also maintain a proper distance in the sacristy and during any entrance/recessional processions.
- Any possible limit of people present for 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.
- Hand sanitizer is to be available in the sanctuary for use whenever any liturgical ministers will share the same space at any point during Mass. For example – lectors, cantors, deacons and/or priests should visibly sanitize their hands upon approaching the ambo, if it is used by multiple individuals during the same 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.
- The hosts to be consecrated for the faithful should be placed in a ciborium on a corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts not directly in front of him as he prays the Eucharistic prayer.
- 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 Ho-

ly 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 but pastors have been given the ability to restore the Communion Rite to its appropriate place within the context of the Mass. If a parish restores the Communion Rite to within the Mass, extreme care must be taken to make sure that parishioners leave the church in a socially distant manner and avoid congregating in groups. In either instance, the process 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.
- 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 after they receive Holy Communion, moving the mask down only slightly to consume the host and then returning the mask to its proper position (covering the nose and mouth).
- 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 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.

## **ADVENT SEASON/CHRISTMAS**

- The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days will remain suspended until further notice. This includes the upcoming holy days of the Immaculate Conception (December 8), the Nativity of the Lord (December 25) and Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- Parishes can use any overflow areas (basements/halls, etc.) available to them to livestream Mass broadcasts. Parishes are encouraged to pay particular attention to entrance and exit procedures to avoid large numbers of people congregating.
- Mindful of the responsibility that the bishop has to direct the celebration of the sacred liturgy within the Diocese of Scranton (CIC c. 838 §1), and also mindful of the grave cause that exists in the midst of the current pandemic, Bishop Joseph C. Bambera is allowing parishes for Christmas 2020 to celebrate an additional Christmas Eve mass as early as 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 24, 2020. This exception applies for the current year only and is not meant to be repeated without further notification. Furthermore, this provision can only be enacted if the parish maintains the same Christmas Eve mass schedule from previous years. If the pastor or Parish Life Coordinator chooses to invoke this privilege, it is understood that the earlier celebrated mass does not replace a later mass. This privilege is extended solely for the purpose of accommodating a greater number of the Christian faithful and does not qualify as a replacement for a later-scheduled mass.
- The Diocese of Scranton, after confirmation obtained from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, will allow priests to celebrate up to four Masses on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not a requirement that this many Masses be held and permission is granted for Christmas 2020 only.
- For all worship during the Advent and Christmas season, parishes must continue to limit the length of time people are gathered, avoid congregational singing and eliminate multiple use or shared items like printed worship aids or hymnals.

- While some parishes are not currently using a reservation system, they are encouraged to plan ahead for crowds and especially for people coming from out-of-town, or who may be unfamiliar with a particular parish's plans. Frequent communication with parishioners and the greater community will be essential! Coordinated efforts among neighboring parishes will also help to provide people as many options as possible for participation.
- As the obligation to attend Mass will still be suspended at Christmas, those who are hesitant to attend Mass on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day should be encouraged to attend Mass during the Christmas Season, especially during the Christmas Octave.
- Deaneries or parish clusters are encouraged to collaborate on the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Mass schedule to allow for the greatest number of options for those desiring to celebrate Mass. Christmas Mass times of neighboring parishes can be published in parish bulletins and social media.
- Christmas decorations, including the Advent wreath and Christmas crèche, may be utilized as usual. Any individuals decorating the church, including vendors delivering trees or flowers, are asked to remain masked while working or in church.
- Christmas pageants of any kind are not allowed this year, even outside the liturgy.
- For the care and protection of all, parish staffs should take great care to avoid any large parties/gatherings with one another during the Christmas season.

## **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 casket 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.