

Diocese of Winona-Rochester

Guidelines for Beginning the Public Celebration of Masses

I. DIRECTIVES that should be followed for the safe celebration of Mass:

Preparations before Mass:

1. The faithful should be aware that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains dispensed until further notice.
2. Priests and deacons over age 70, or those with pre-existing health conditions, are discouraged from publicly celebrating or participating in public Mass. If they do, it should be done with extra care, decreasing interactions when possible.
3. Priests should not celebrate more than three Masses on Sunday (Can. 905 §2). Permission to celebrate more than three Masses must be requested.
4. In order to limit travel to multiple locations around the Diocese, the aid of “help-out” priests ought to be kept to a minimum, ideally employed in emergency cases only.
5. Attendance at each individual Mass is limited to 25% percentage of occupancy or 250 individuals, whichever number is lower, with proper social distancing unless the local or state authorities have implemented a more stringent order. Pastors, through ushers or other volunteers, must not allow more than the permitted number to enter the church.
6. Mass may be celebrated outdoors on church property, so long as these guidelines are followed.
7. Those attending Mass should be strongly encouraged to wear masks. Parishes may require masks if they wish. Priests should wear masks on the way into and out of church, and while distributing Communion.
8. Signage must be placed on entrance doors reminding anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the church.
9. Limit the number of entrances being used and designate an entrance door and an exit door, where possible.
10. Social distancing of a minimum of 6 feet between people not living in the same household must be followed.
11. A minimum of using every other pew should be followed; every third pew is preferred. Intervening pews must be cordoned off, not only for the sake of social distancing, but to reduce the areas in need of sanitizing between Masses.

12. All Missals, hymnals, prayer cards or other paper resources must be removed from pews. Printed worship aids are discouraged, while providing on-line worship aids is encouraged. If paper worship aids are used, they should be limited to one page and people should be directed to take them with them after Mass. If worship aids are left in a pew, they must be collected and destroyed after each Mass; they cannot be reused for the next Mass.
13. Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances and exits.
14. Holy Water fonts and baptismal fonts must remain empty.
15. In an effort to reduce exposure, only essential persons need to assist with Mass. If possible, limit the number of ushers, greeters, altar servers and/or volunteers needed for each Mass.
16. A cantor and accompanist are allowed, but choirs should not be used.
17. Hospitality ministers and ushers must wear masks and must not make physical contact when greeting parishioners.
18. Sacristans and those who prepare communion elements must carefully wash their hands prior to touching the breads and pouring the wine; a facemask and gloves are recommended.
19. All vessels containing the bread and wine are to remain covered until placed on the altar, and may remain covered during the Eucharistic Prayer.
20. Separate chalices should be used for the celebrant, each concelebrant, and deacon.
21. All patens, ciboria, chalices, cruets, bread and wine should remain on the credence table in the sanctuary and handled only by the sacristan or those whom the pastor delegates.
22. All liturgical ministers must wash/sanitize their hands before and after Mass.
23. Parishes must develop and implement a COVID-19 preparedness plan that addresses the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) guidance for safely reopening our churches.

During Mass:

24. For a monetary collection, baskets or other appropriate containers could be placed at church exits or elsewhere in the building for people to drop envelopes or donations. As an alternative, baskets with long handles are allowed; collection baskets are not to be passed person-to-person. Ushers taking the collection should wear masks and gloves. Ushers must immediately wash or sanitize their hands after the collection.
25. There is to be no presentation of gifts.

26. The Sign of Peace is omitted entirely. Consequently, during Mass, when the celebrant says, “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” and the people respond, “And with your spirit,” the celebrant forgoes the usual invitation to offer a Sign of Peace and moves immediately to the “Lamb of God.”

27. The faithful should be reminded that at this time no one is obliged to receive communion, and that Christ is encountered in those gathered in his name, in the proclamation of the Word, and especially by joining themselves to the offering of Christ to God the Father during the Eucharistic Prayer. The benefits of Spiritual Communion should continue to be promoted.

28. Communion is to be distributed by the priest(s), deacon, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) as needed.

29. All communion ministers must sanitize their hands before and after the distribution of holy communion.

30. Communicants should be reminded to observe the 6-foot distance between themselves while in line to receive holy communion. Only one, single-file line is permitted to approach the minister, rather than two parallel lines.

31. If inadvertent contact is made between minister and communicant, the minister is to purify his hands before continuing to distribute Communion. It may be prudent to have a small table with the proper items for sanitizing nearby.

32. Encourage Communion to be received only in the hand for the health and safety of both the minister and faithful. Any communicant wearing gloves must remove them prior to receiving. Those who receive in the hand should consume their consecrated host in the presence of the minister. If someone insists on receiving Communion on the tongue, an EMHC should be designated for this purpose. If no EMHC is available or willing, communicants should receive on the hand, or make a Spiritual Communion.

33. Communion will not be distributed to the faithful from the chalice.

After Mass:

34. Based on the parish’s COVID-19 preparedness plan, use the plan’s log to document adherence to the protocols within the preparedness plan.

35. As an alternative to handing out bulletins, parish bulletins, if necessary, should be posted to the parish website or emailed to parishioners. Still, parish bulletins may be passed out by ushers, who are wearing masks and gloves, after Mass.

36. Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every liturgy. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

37. Non-essential gatherings should be suspended, including Children's Liturgy of the Word, post-Mass social gatherings/refreshments (e.g., coffee & donuts), etc.

38. After being purified according to the rubrics, all communion vessels are to be thoroughly and properly cleaned after Mass with hot, soapy water.

39. Offertory money should be placed in a tamper-evident bag, logged, and kept in the safe. It may be beneficial to wait at least 3 days before counting the collection.

40. Offertory counters should wear gloves and masks, and practice social distancing.

41. Restrooms should be cleaned between Masses.

II. SUGGESTIONS for the priest's discretion:

42. All those as defined by the health department as more vulnerable (i.e., 65+ years of age, those with compromised immune systems, those with underlying health conditions, those who are especially anxious about being in a large group, etc.) should be encouraged to stay at home.

43. Mass attendance should be organized in some way:

- designate Mass times by household name (A to H, Mass 1; I to O, Mass 2; etc.);
- provide a sign-up system either on the parish website or by calling the parish office;
- assign a Mass time per registered family;
- to meet occupancy requirements, registration is by designated time – no walk-in attendance.

44. Ushers should direct the Communion line and markings should be placed on the floor to preserve social distancing.

45. If possible, hand sanitizer should be available in the aisle(s) for use by people prior to receiving communion.

46. Gathering area tables and chairs should be put into storage so as not to invite people to use them.

47. Entrance doors should be propped open to limit contact with door handles, or else ushers should hold open doors.

48. The use of familiar hymns is encouraged to limit any need for a worship aid.

49. Directions for dismissal after Mass should be offered by the celebrant to provide an orderly exit with proper social distancing. Ushers can release the faithful pew-by-pew, or similar.

50. Attendees should be advised to wash their clothes following the service.

III. CONSIDERATIONS for implementing suggestions:

51. Communion may be distributed at its normal time or after Mass, according to the pastor's prudential decision.
52. Arrange for the parish to have enough cleaning supplies.
53. Develop a process for cleaning between Masses that maintains social distancing.
54. Determine the minimum number of people needed to clean pews and surfaces.
55. Estimate how long it will take to clean properly between Masses and schedule Mass times accordingly. Consider spacing Masses further apart, if necessary.
56. There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass to contract the coronavirus.
57. There is no pre-determined timeline for how long restrictions will be in place; further developments may allow for the loosening of restrictions or call for the tightening of restrictions.

IV. SUMMARY of information that will be helpful to share with parishioners:

58. Those over age 65 are strongly encouraged not to attend, and anyone showing any symptoms of sickness, or anyone who has a household member who is sick or showing symptoms of sickness should not come to church. As much care as each parish has for your safety, individuals do put themselves at risk by attending Mass.
59. Seating will be limited; please follow the stated limits set by your parish.
60. Follow all posted signs concerning social distancing and sanitation requirements.
61. All parishioners are strongly encouraged or required to wear masks, according to their parish's directives.
62. Parishioners are strongly encouraged to receive Communion on the hand.
63. Please do not engage in any physical touch, such as by greeting each other.
64. All will be expected to cooperate with instructions from ushers, including using one-way traffic patterns.
65. Collection baskets will not be passed by hand.