

Guidelines on Sacraments and Pastoral Care

*Working Group on Infectious Disease Protocols for Sacraments & Pastoral Care*¹

April 28, 2020

Part III - Phased Restoration of Public Masses

General Principles:

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a serious threat to physical health. In response, public authorities are right to place limits on gatherings, to discourage unnecessary activities, and to call for physical distancing. At the same time, access to divine worship and to sacraments is of high importance for the spiritual good and the overall well-being of the faithful. As Catholics, we maintain that Christian worship and sacraments are just as necessary for the human person -- indeed, far more necessary -- than many commercial activities now permitted. This is particularly true in a time of widespread anxiety and potentially grave sickness.

The guidance provided here aims to clarify how such spiritual care, including public Masses, can be responsibly offered, especially as peak restrictions on public activities begin to be relaxed in phases. With proper safeguards to prevent infection, and integrating the scientific guidance of public health authorities as outlined below, it is possible to provide the Mass and the sacraments to the faithful in this period.

¹ Dr. Timothy P. Flanigan, M.D. (Prof. of Medicine (infectious diseases), Alpert Medical School of Brown University); Fr. Nicanor Austriaco, O.P. (Prof. of Biology, Providence College); Dr. Thomas W. McGovern, M.D. (Catholic Medical Association National Board Member, Former Clinical Research Physician, U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases); Fr. Dominic Legge, O.P. (Assist. Prof. of Theology, Director of the Thomistic Institute, Dominican House of Studies); Fr. Dominic Langevin, O.P. (Assistant Professor, Editor of *The Thomist*, Dominican House of Studies); Fr. Paul Scalia (Vicar for Clergy, Diocese of Arlington); Fr. Gregory Pine, O.P. (Thomistic Institute). We are grateful for the comments and review of Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo (*Attaché, Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva and Secretary General, International Catholic Migration Commission*); Dr. Thomas Cesario, M.D. (*Prof. of Medicine (infectious diseases), Univ. of Calif. Irvine School of Medicine*); Dr. Paul Cieslak, M.D. (*Infectious Diseases & Public Health, Catholic Medical Association member*); Dr. Daniel Sulmasy, M.D., Ph.D. (*Prof. of Medicine, Georgetown University*); Dr. Suzanne Strom, M.D. (*Associate Clinical Professor, University of California, Irvine*); Fr. Christopher Pollard (*Diocese of Arlington*); and Fr. John Baptist Ku, O.P. (*Assoc. Prof., Dominican House of Studies*).

The following is based on current guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities. These guidelines also integrate the requirements of the Catholic Church for the valid and licit celebration of the Mass, in accord with Catholic teaching, liturgical law, and canon law. We have endeavored to formulate them with great care to preserve and respect the reverence due to the Holy Eucharist and the powerful liturgical and sacramental symbolism of the rites of the Mass.

We have divided these guidelines into phases, to correspond to the indications from the U.S. federal government on how public health authorities will step-down the restrictions on public activity as we pass through different stages of the COVID response.

We intend this document to reflect the most current guidance from health authorities. We will update it as the official guidance changes (as we expect it will, as we pass through different phases of the outbreak and as we learn more about the virus).

Latest information on how COVID-19 spreads:

According to [the latest information from the CDC](#) (April 22, 2020), “[t]he virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).”

[The CDC adds:](#) “Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food.” “It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging.”

The CDC does not recommend that food take-out services be stopped, although it does counsel maintaining physical distancing measures (6 foot distance) where possible.

NB: For guidelines for distributing Holy Communion outside of Mass, which could be done even under the most restrictive limits on the size of public gatherings, see [the appendix at the end of this document](#).

A. Phase I: Public Masses with strict limits on public gatherings and strict physical distancing

In phase I, limits on public gatherings remain in place (in many locations, 10 people or less), although larger gatherings in “places of worship” may be permitted if strict physical distancing is maintained (for more on this, see point 2, below). Health authorities also recommend frequent hand hygiene, vigilance in maintaining physical distancing, and the use of face coverings in public. Anyone feeling sick should stay home, and anyone who has been in close contact with a COVID+ individual should self-quarantine for 14 days.²

Physical distancing calls for avoiding “close contact” with those outside one’s household. “Close contact” generally means avoiding being within 6 feet of another person, especially if this will last for 15 minutes or more.

Certain necessary tasks (e.g., receiving medical care, purchasing food, visiting a pharmacy, working in an essential business) may require that one come closer than 6 feet to others for brief periods. Reception of the sacraments is important for the faithful in the midst of this pandemic, and so the same guidelines apply: one should generally try to avoid being within 6 feet of others, but where necessary, a momentary interaction presents an acceptable risk, especially if other precautions are taken. Given how the virus is thought to spread (principally via respiratory droplets from sneezes and coughs), this risk is lower for brief encounters than in cases of prolonged contact.

1. General Provisions

- Dispense the faithful from the obligation to attend Mass during this phase.
- Encourage those who are at higher risk from COVID-19 (i.e. those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) to stay home. As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible. (*Guidance for bringing Holy Communion to a private home is forthcoming in a separate part of these guidelines.*)
- Tell the faithful that anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies.

² “Close contact” with a COVID-19 case is defined by the CDC as contact with a person who is COVID+ for a prolonged period of time (typically 15 minutes or more) or direct infectious exposure (via respiratory droplets, like being sneezed on) to someone who is COVID+. ([CDC on how COVID spreads](#))

- Place hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church. Encourage those entering and exiting to perform hand hygiene.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly-touched surfaces in the church. (See [CDC recommendations on cleaning your facility](#).)
- In accord with current public health recommendations, the faithful should wear cloth face coverings when in public, including when they come to church. Surgical masks or N-95 respirators are not recommended. (See [CDC recommendations on face coverings](#).)
 - Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. (See [CDC recommendations on face coverings](#).)
 - See below for special instructions concerning the reception of Holy Communion.

2. Limiting the Size of the Congregation & Physical Distancing

- Masses should be limited in attendance, depending on the guidance of public health authorities.
 - Guidance from the [U.S. federal government](#) says that, during the first phase of reduced restrictions, *in cases where strict physical distancing cannot be observed*, social gatherings should generally be of no more than 10 people. It adds that venues like “places of worship. . . can operate under strict physical distancing protocols.” That is, according to the federal government’s guidance, **a church can hold larger gatherings in this first phase if it can provide for strict physical distancing**. (More on this below.)
 - State or local health authorities may modify the federal guidance to be more or less restrictive for a given jurisdiction.
 - **Recommendation:** Masses could be scheduled with greater frequency. Attendance could be first-come first-served, or allocated by some other system (a rotation system based on the first letter of last names, an online ticketing system like Eventbrite, etc.).
 - **Alternative:** “Drive-in” or outdoor Masses are possible, where the Mass is celebrated in a location visible to the faithful who remain in their cars. For example, a Mass could be celebrated on the front steps of a church, or in a church parking lot (perhaps on a platform erected for this purpose).

Such events do not constitute gatherings of more than 10 persons, if the attendees remain in their cars.

- **Strict Physical Distancing:** In Phase I, a Catholic church or chapel may hold public Masses of more than 10 persons (taking account of local health guidance), as long as it maintains strict physical distancing. (See [U.S. federal guidelines](#).)

For a public Mass, to maintain strict physical distancing:

- The faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other at all times.
 - **Recommendation:** Use tape to close off rows of seating in the church, in order to guide the faithful to sit at least 6 feet from each other (for example, allow seating every third row).
- Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row. (For example, if a group arrived in a single private vehicle, they could sit together.)
- In areas where the faithful might stand in line (for example, waiting to go to confession or to receive Holy Communion), place tape on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.
- Station ushers at the entrances of the church to help “direct traffic,” to ensure that the faithful keep 6 feet from each other while entering and exiting the building. (Members of a single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other.)
 - Suggestion: dismiss the congregation by rows at the end of Mass to avoid crowding at the exits.
- If all the available spaces are filled, do not admit additional people to the church building.
- Encourage the faithful to maintain physical distancing everywhere on the church property (on the church steps, in the parking lot, etc.).
- Develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other.
- Choirs are discouraged, especially if seated together. Vigorous singing, especially in close proximity to others, may increase the risk of viral spread.

3. Specific Provisions for the Parts of the Mass

- A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public masses or administering sacraments during this phase. The same holds for other

ministers who might serve at a Mass (deacon, servers, lectors) as well as for sacristans, ushers, etc.

- The priest celebrant and other ministers should **not** wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass. Instead, they should remain more than 6 feet from the congregation during the entirety of the Mass. In such circumstances, there is no substantial risk of infection.
 - A further consideration: the Mass is imbued with powerful sacramental and liturgical symbolism. Wearing a mask and gloves would be a detrimental counter-sign in this context, and it is not warranted by considerations of hygiene if the priest remains a proper distance from the congregation. (An analogy: public health officials do not wear masks during press conferences, given the nature of those public appearances and the distance between the officials and the audience/press, although they do wear them in private meetings.)
- To the extent possible, the other ministers (deacon, servers, lectors) should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other, except as provided below.
 - *Suggestion:* 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.
 - Maintain a proper distance in the sacristy and during the entrance and recessional processions.
 - If necessary given the configuration of the church, consider modifying the procession's route in order to maintain a 6-foot distance from members of the congregation.
 - The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) should be omitted.
 - A deacon (if present) or a server may bring the missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair. (Alternatively, the priest could do this himself.) After the deacon or server moves away, the priest could come to the altar and arrange the items on the altar.
 - The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance, either at a credence table near the altar or at the side of the altar itself. After the priest returns to the center of the altar, a server could then remove the lavabo items.
- Special provision should be made for the collection -- baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can remain a suitable distance from others.

- Alternative: set up central boxes or collection points where the faithful can place their contributions.
- If hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could be placed on a second 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 on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer.
- For the elevation of the sacred species at “*Through him, and with him, and in him,*” if a deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is brief, he need not remain 6 feet from the priest while doing so.
- The invitation to the faithful to exchange a sign of peace should be omitted.

4. The Distribution of Holy Communion

We recommend three possible ways for handling the issue of Holy Communion, in order to reflect both the Church’s great reverence for the Eucharist and the powerful sacramental and liturgical symbolism of Holy Communion, while also providing appropriate precautions against infection. Option 1 provides for Mass without any distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful. Option 2 provides for Holy Communion immediately at the end of Mass, with additional precautions (our recommended option). Option 3 provides for Holy Communion during Mass, with more modest precautions.

Option 2 has several advantages over Option 3 (explained in more detail below): it more clearly communicates that the faithful need not receive Holy Communion if they have reservations; allows for the priest to wear a mask for Holy Communion while preserving the principle that the priest would never be masked during Mass (in Option 3, the priest does not wear a mask for Communion because it is during Mass); and provides for hand sanitizer at the communion stations.

NB: As noted above, as of April 22, [the CDC’s most recent guidance](#) states: “Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food,” and “there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging.” The CDC does not recommend that food take-out services be stopped, although it does counsel maintaining physical distancing measures (6 foot distance) where possible.

Option 1: Mass without distributing Holy Communion

This is the most restrictive option. Since being present and actively participating in the Mass is a great good for the faithful, and since it is not strictly necessary that any particular members of the faithful receive Holy Communion at Mass, Mass could be celebrated in which only the priest (or, if a deacon is present, only the priest and deacon) consume the Eucharist. In this case, they would do so in the normal way. The priest would then proceed to the post-communion prayer.

Obviously, it is far preferable that the faithful would receive Holy Communion, but at least in this case they would be able to attend Mass in person.

Option 2: Mass followed by the distribution of Holy Communion, with special precautions

This is our recommended option, because it respects the symbolic and liturgical integrity of the Mass (which should be celebrated without mask or gloves), avoids any practices in the Mass that could become sources of future liturgical abuse, gives a greater freedom to the faithful to determine whether or not they will come forward for Holy Communion (some may be nervous about doing so), and also provides for additional precautions to reduce risk. It also will permit the priest to remove his chasuble for the distribution of Holy Communion, given that it is difficult to launder if anyone should sneeze or cough on him.

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the conclusion of the Mass. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The Precious Blood should not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a concelebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)
- A sufficient quantity of hosts for distribution to the faithful should be consecrated at the Mass.
- The priest (and, if present, the deacon) would consume the Eucharist in the normal way, but would not immediately proceed to distribute Communion to the servers or the faithful. Rather, the newly-consecrated hosts would be briefly placed in the tabernacle awaiting the conclusion of the Mass.
- After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest (and deacon, if present) remain in the sanctuary. At the chair, the priest removes his chasuble and the deacon removes his dalmatic.

- A small table should be placed at each communion station, with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion) should use hand sanitizer immediately before approaching the tabernacle. He may also don a surgical mask or cloth face covering.
 - NB: If the priest who has celebrated the Mass is in a higher-risk group, a different priest, arriving at the conclusion of Mass, might distribute Holy Communion in his place.
- Now vested in alb and stole, the priest retrieves the newly-consecrated hosts from the tabernacle and returns to the altar.
- Holding up a single host, he says: “*Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*” He then leads the people in saying: “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.*”
- The priest (and other ministers if present) proceeds to the place prepared for distribution of Communion. Each stands next to a table with corporal and hand sanitizer in order to distribute Communion.
- The faithful should remove any face coverings before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
 - Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed if the priest performs hand hygiene.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer. (He may also arrange for an ablution cup to be on the table, and may purify his fingers in the ablution cup before using hand sanitizer.) He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.
- **Communion on the tongue vs. in the hand:** We have carefully considered the question of Communion on the tongue vs. Communion in the hand. Given the Church’s existing guidance on this point (see [*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#), no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, we believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk.
 - Opinions on this point are varied within the medical and scientific community: some believe Communion on the tongue involves an elevated

and, in the light of all the circumstances, an unreasonable risk; others disagree. If Communion on the tongue is provided, one could consider using hand sanitizer after each communicant who receives on the tongue.

- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle.
- The faithful may depart after making a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

Alternatively, the priest may say the concluding prayer, blessing, and dismissal from the *Rite for Holy Communion Outside of Mass*, as follows:

“Let us pray. O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

He then gives a blessing in the normal way and dismisses the people with: *“Go in the peace of Christ.”*

Option 3: Mass with the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass

This is also a reasonable option, especially in circumstances where mitigated precautions are appropriate. Given that Holy Communion is distributed during the Mass, more care should be taken to avoid adopting hygiene measures that could become a counter-sign to the liturgical and sacramental signification of the priest’s actions at Mass. This option therefore does not recommend the same level of precautions as Option 2: we do not recommend that a priest wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass, and we caution that the frequent and obvious use of hand sanitizer during Mass is to be discouraged.

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that, for those who desire to receive Holy Communion, they may do so at the appropriate moment, but that those who wish to remain in their places may do so. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The Precious Blood will not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a concelebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)
- The faithful should remove any face coverings before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.

- The priest should perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing Holy Communion.
- Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed.
- We have carefully considered the question of Communion on the tongue vs. Communion in the hand. Given the Church's existing guidance on this point (see [*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#), no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, we believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).
- The Mass concludes as normal.

A Note about Drive-in Masses or Drive-up Holy Communion:

In cases where the faithful are in their cars (either for a drive-in Mass or drive-up distribution of Holy Communion), the communicants should get out of their cars to receive, one car at a time. This could be done akin to what is [recommended above for Holy Communion after Mass](#).

This is preferable from a public health perspective, because it permits the priest (wearing a mask but not gloves) to stand next to a hand sanitizing station (a table with corporal and hand sanitizer, as described above) and thus gives him the ability to sanitize his hands after each Holy Communion, if necessary. If the priest walks from car to car or from window to window, this hand hygiene would be difficult.

It is also preferable from a sacramental perspective, because it removes the temptation to pass the Eucharist from person to person in the car, if a passenger is not near an open window, and eliminates the problem of self-communication.

In addition, distribution of the Eucharist in another vessel or container (a plastic bag, paper cup, or a metal pyx) is not warranted from a public health perspective and may even increase risk: CDC guidance suggests that the virus is not easily transmitted by food, whereas passing other containers from person to person involves more contact with surfaces. From a sacramental perspective, there are additional reasons to discourage this practice, dealing with reverence for the sacrament, the problem of self-communication, the danger of profanation, and the problem of purifying or disposing of containers.

In principle, there should be no public health objection to having people exit their cars, one car at a time (perhaps guided by an usher to direct traffic). This would not constitute a large gathering.

B. Phase II: Public Masses with moderate limits on public gatherings and moderate physical distancing

According to the [current guidance from the U.S. federal government](#), phase II will permit larger public gatherings: up to 50 persons, and if physical distancing can be observed, even larger assemblies may be permitted. Places of worship may operate with moderate physical distancing protocols.

Observing moderate physical distancing means continuing to avoid “close contact” with those outside one’s household. (“Close contact” generally means avoiding being within 6 feet of another person, especially if this will last for 15 minutes or more.) Being within 6 feet of another person for brief moments and exchanges is permitted in this phase.

In this phase, more activities in public are permitted, and likewise churches may begin to permit more activity, with appropriate precautions. Reception of the sacraments is important for the faithful in the midst of this pandemic, and so in this phase, one should generally try to avoid being within 6 feet of others, but where necessary, a momentary interaction presents an acceptable risk, especially if other precautions are taken. Given how the virus is thought to spread (principally via respiratory droplets from sneezes and coughs), this risk is lower for brief encounters than in cases of prolonged contact.

NB: Depending on the circumstances, some jurisdictions that reach Phase II may later be obliged to return to Phase I, with its greater restrictions. This may call for adaptation of these guidelines in the future as circumstances warrant.

1. General Provisions

- Dispense all at-risk individuals from the obligation to attend Mass during this phase, as well as anyone feeling sick or experiencing respiratory symptoms, even if not suspected to be COVID-related.
- Encourage those who are at higher risk from COVID-19 (i.e. those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) to stay home. As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible. (*Guidance for bringing Holy*

Communion to a private home is forthcoming in a separate part of these guidelines.)

- Tell the faithful that anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies.
- Place hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church. Encourage those entering and exiting to perform hand hygiene.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly-touched surfaces in the church. (See [CDC recommendations on cleaning your facility](#).)
- Follow the recommendations of public health authorities regarding face coverings.

2. Limiting the Size of the Congregation & Physical Distancing

- Masses should be limited in attendance, depending on the guidance of public health authorities.
 - [Guidance from the U.S. federal government](#) says that, during the second phase of reduced restrictions, social gatherings may be as large as 50 persons. It adds that venues like “places of worship. . . can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols.” That is, according to the federal government’s guidance, **a church can hold gatherings larger than 50 in this second phase if it can provide for moderate physical distancing.** (More on this below.)
 - Local health authorities may modify the federal guidance to be more or less restrictive for a given jurisdiction.
 - **Recommendation:** Masses could be scheduled with greater frequency. Attendance could be first-come first-served, or allocated by some other system (a rotation system based on the first letter of last names, an online ticketing system like Eventbrite, etc.).
 - **Alternative:** Larger “drive-in” or outdoor Masses remain possible, where the Mass is celebrated in a location visible to the faithful who remain in their cars.
- **Moderate Physical Distancing:** In Phase II, a Catholic church or chapel may hold public Masses of more than 50 persons (taking account of local health guidance), as long as it maintains moderate physical distancing. For a public Mass, moderate physical distancing should include:
 - The faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other insofar as possible.

- **Recommendation:** Use tape to close off rows of seating in the church, in order to guide the faithful to sit at least 6 feet from each other (for example, allow seating every third row).
- Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row.
- In areas where the faithful might stand in line (for example, waiting to go to confession or to receive Holy Communion), place tape on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.
- Station ushers at the entrances of the church in order to help “direct traffic,” to help the faithful keep 6 feet from each other while entering and exiting the building. (Members of a single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other.)
- If all the available spaces are filled, do not admit additional people to the church building.
- Encourage the faithful to maintain physical distancing everywhere on the church property (on the church steps, in the parking lot, etc.).
- Develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other.
- Choirs are discouraged, especially if seated together. Vigorous singing, especially in close proximity to others, may increase the risk of viral spread.

3. Specific Provisions for the Parts of the Mass

- A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public masses or administering sacraments during this phase. The same holds for other ministers who might serve at a Mass (deacon, servers, lectors).
- The priest celebrant and other ministers should **not** wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass. Instead, they should remain more than 6 feet from the congregation during the entirety of the Mass. In such circumstances, there is no substantial risk of infection.
 - A further consideration: the Mass is imbued with powerful sacramental and liturgical symbolism. Wearing a mask and gloves would be a detrimental counter-sign in this context, and it is not warranted by considerations of hygiene if the priest remains a proper distance from the congregation. (An analogy: public health officials do not wear masks

during press conferences, given the nature of those public appearances and the distance between the officials and the audience/press, although they do wear them in private meetings.)

- It remains advisable for the ministers to maintain a reasonable distance from each other, but in this phase, they may be seated in their normal locations if more suitable in light of the layout of the sanctuary.
 - *Suggestion:* 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.
 - The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) should be omitted.
- Special provision should be made for the collection -- baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can remain a suitable distance from others.
 - Alternative: set up central boxes or collection points where the faithful can place their contributions.
- If hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could be placed on a second 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 on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer.
- For the elevation of the sacred species at “*Through him, and with him, and in him,*” if a deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice.
- The invitation to the faithful to exchange a sign of peace should be omitted.

4. The Distribution of Holy Communion

Holy Communion may be distributed. We recommend two possible ways to do this, both of which reflect both the Church’s great reverence for the Eucharist and the powerful sacramental and liturgical symbolism of Holy Communion, while also providing appropriate precautions against infection.

NB: As noted above, as of April 22, [the CDC’s most recent guidance](#) states: “Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food,” and “there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging.” The CDC does not recommend that food take-out services be stopped, although it does counsel maintaining physical distancing measures (6 foot distance) where possible.

Option 1: Mass followed by the distribution of Holy Communion, with special precautions

This is our recommended option, because it respects the symbolic and liturgical integrity of the Mass (which should be celebrated without mask or gloves), avoids any practices in the Mass that could become sources of future liturgical abuse, gives a greater freedom to the faithful to determine whether or not they will come forward for Holy Communion (some may be nervous about doing so), and also provides for additional precautions to reduce risk. It also will permit the priest to remove his chasuble for the distribution of Holy Communion, given that it is difficult to launder.

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the conclusion of the Mass. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The Precious Blood should not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a concelebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)
- A sufficient quantity of hosts for distribution to the faithful should be consecrated at the Mass.
- The priest (and, if present, the deacon) would consume the Eucharist in the normal way, but would not immediately proceed to distribute Communion to the servers or the faithful. Rather, the newly-consecrated hosts would be briefly placed in the tabernacle awaiting the conclusion of the Mass.
- After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest (and deacon, if present) remain in the sanctuary. At the chair, the priest removes his chasuble and the deacon removes his dalmatic.
- A small table should be placed at each communion station, with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion) should use hand sanitizer immediately before approaching the tabernacle. (Optional: He may also don a surgical mask or cloth face covering.)
 - NB: If the priest who has celebrated the Mass is in a high-risk group, a different priest, arriving at the conclusion of Mass, might distribute Holy Communion in his place.
- Now vested in alb and stole, the priest retrieves the newly-consecrated hosts from the tabernacle and returns to the altar.
- Holding up a single host, he says: *“Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the*

Lamb.” He then leads the people in saying: “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.*”

- The priest (and other ministers if present) proceeds to the place prepared for distribution of Communion. Each stands next to a table with corporal and hand sanitizer in order to distribute Communion.
- If any of the faithful are wearing face coverings, they should remove them before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
 - Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed if the priest performs hand hygiene.
- We have carefully considered the question of Communion on the tongue vs. Communion in the hand. Given the Church’s existing guidance on this point (see [*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#), no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, we believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer. (He may also arrange for an ablution cup to be on the table, and may purify his fingers in the ablution cup before using hand sanitizer.) He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle.
- The priest offers a concluding prayer, as follows:

“Let us pray. O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”
- He then gives a blessing in the normal way and dismisses the people with: “*Go in the peace of Christ.*”

Option 2: Mass with the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass

This is also a reasonable option, especially in circumstances where mitigated precautions are appropriate. Given that Holy Communion is distributed during the Mass, more care should be taken to avoid adopting hygiene measures that could become a counter-sign to

the liturgical and sacramental signification of the priest's actions at Mass. This option therefore does not recommend the same level of precautions as Option 1: we do not recommend that a priest wear a mask for the distribution of Holy Communion during Mass, and we caution that the frequent and obvious use of hand sanitizer during Mass is to be discouraged.

- At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the appropriate moment, but that those who wish to remain in their places may do so. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-foot distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- The Precious Blood will not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a concelebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)
- If any of the faithful are wearing face coverings, they should remove them before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
 - The priest should perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing Holy Communion.
 - Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed.
- **Communion on the tongue vs. in the hand:** We have carefully considered the question of Communion on the tongue vs. Communion in the hand. Given the Church's existing guidance on this point (see [*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#), no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, we believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk.
 - Opinions on this point are varied within the medical and scientific community: some believe Communion on the tongue involves an elevated and, in the light of all the circumstances, an unreasonable risk; others disagree. If Communion on the tongue is provided, one could consider using hand sanitizer after each communicant who receives on the tongue.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).
- The Mass concludes as normal.

A Note about Drive-in Masses or Drive-up Holy Communion:

In cases where the faithful are in their cars (either for a drive-in Mass or drive-up distribution of Holy Communion), the communicants should get out of their cars to receive, one car at a time.

This is preferable from a public health perspective, because it permits the priest to stand next to a hand sanitizing station (a table with corporal and hand sanitizer, as described above) and thus gives him the ability to sanitize his hands after each Holy Communion, if necessary. If the priest walks from car to car or from window to window, this hand hygiene would be difficult.

It is also preferable from a sacramental perspective, because it removes the temptation to pass the Eucharist from person to person in the car, if a passenger is not near an open window, and eliminates the problem of self-communication.

In addition, distribution of the Eucharist in another vessel or container (a plastic bag, paper cup, or a metal pyx) is not warranted from a public health perspective and may even increase risk: CDC guidance suggests that the virus is not easily transmitted by food, whereas passing other containers from person to person involves more contact with surfaces. From a sacramental perspective, there are additional reasons to discourage this practice, dealing with reverence for the sacrament, the problem of self-communication, the danger of profanation, and the problem of purifying or disposing of containers.

In principle, there should be no public health objection to having people exit their cars, one car at a time (perhaps guided by an usher to direct traffic). This would not constitute a large gathering.

C. Phase III: Public Masses with minimal limits on public gatherings and limited physical distancing.

According to the [current guidance from the U.S. federal government](#), in phase III, there will not be limits on the size of gatherings. At-risk individuals will be encouraged to continue to practice physical distancing. Places of worship may operate under limited physical distancing protocols.

In this phase, the faithful need not remain 6-feet from each other at all times, although they should avoid crowding to the extent possible. In church, therefore, it will no longer be necessary to use tape to close off large portions of seating. However, churches should designate special seating for at-risk persons where physical distancing can be practiced.

NB: Depending on the circumstances, some jurisdictions that reach Phase III may later be obliged to return to earlier phases. This may call for adaptation of these guidelines in the future as circumstances warrant.

1. General Provisions

- Dispense anyone feeling sick or experiencing respiratory symptoms, even if not suspected to be COVID-related, from the obligation to attend Mass.
- Encourage those who are at higher risk from COVID-19 (i.e. those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) to sit in special seating when they come to church, and to continue to practice physical distancing.
- Tell the faithful that anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies.
- Place hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church. Encourage those entering and exiting to perform hand hygiene.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly-touched surfaces in the church. (See [CDC recommendations on cleaning your facility](#).)
- Follow the recommendations of public health authorities regarding face coverings.

2. Physical Distancing

- Masses no longer need to be limited in size.
- In this phase, the faithful need not remain 6-feet from each other at all times, although they should avoid crowding to the extent possible.
- Designate special seating for at-risk persons. Indicate clearly (by taping-off seating, placing signs, etc.) that this seating is for persons who are practicing physical distancing (maintaining a 6-foot distance from others who are not members of their household). Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row.
- Encourage the faithful to avoid crowding, especially in high-traffic areas (for example, when entering or exiting the church, in the vestibule, etc.).

3. Specific Provisions for the Parts of the Mass

- The priest celebrant and other ministers should **not** wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass.

- They no longer need to remain more than 6 feet from the congregation, but should take care to avoid crowding.
- It remains advisable for the ministers to maintain a reasonable distance from each other, but in this phase, they may be seated in their normal locations.
- Consider omitting the offertory procession.
- Consider taking up the collection in such a way as to avoid passing baskets from person to person.
- Consider omitting physical contact at the sign of peace.

4. The Distribution of Holy Communion

- Holy Communion may be distributed in the normal way. Those distributing Communion (whether a priest, deacon, or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion) should not wear masks or face coverings.
- Before beginning the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and other ministers, if present) could use hand sanitizer.
- Do not distribute the Precious Blood to the faithful. (Exception: those with severe reactions to gluten may be permitted to receive the Precious Blood in this phase.)
- Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
- Make special provision so that at-risk individuals can come forward for Holy Communion first, and also so that they can remain 6 feet from other members of the congregation while in line for Holy Communion.
- If any of the faithful are wearing face coverings, they should remove them before coming forward for Holy Communion.
- Communion may be received in the hand or on the tongue.
- At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).
- The Mass concludes as normal.

Appendix: Distribution of Holy Communion to Individuals outside of Mass (may be done while observing strict limits to the size of public gatherings)

Even where there are very strict limits on public gatherings, it is possible to distribute Holy Communion to individuals outside of Mass, as described below.. For example, a parish might livestream a Mass, consecrate hosts for Holy Communion at that Mass, and then designate times later in the day when the faithful could come to the church individually to receive Holy

Communion. The same procedure might be used when only small numbers are able to be present for a public Mass -- for those who cannot attend due to the restricted size of the assembly, distributing Holy Communion at a later time might provide some measure of consolation and spiritual strength to the faithful who were not admitted to Mass.

Attending Mass in person is obviously far preferable. This is not meant to be a substitute for attending Mass, but a stop-gap measure in a time of serious disruption.

- Only a small number of the faithful are admitted to the church at any one time (under current restrictions, this might be less than 8 or less than 10 persons).
- Station ushers outside of the church to control the flow of traffic. Ask the faithful to remain in their cars until it is their turn to stand in line.
- Designate a waiting area outside of the church where the faithful can line up, maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other at all time.
- A small table should be placed at each communion station, with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer.
- The priest (and any other ministers) use hand sanitizer immediately before beginning to distribute Holy Communion. They may also don a surgical mask or cloth face covering.
- Allow into the church at any time only the number permitted by local health authorities (e.g., no more than 10 persons at a time).
- Place tape on the floor of the aisle of the church to indicate where the faithful should stand before receiving Holy Communion. This will help ensure proper physical distancing.
- After a cohort of the faithful enter and take their places in line, the priest conducts the *Rite for Holy Communion Outside of Mass*, choosing the option for the short form of the readings (e.g., Jn 6:54-55, Jn 14:6, Jn 14:23, or the other options set forth in that Rite).
- As provided in that Rite, he holds up a single host and says: “*Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*” He then leads the people in saying: “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.*”
 - The faithful should lower any face coverings before coming forward for Holy Communion.
 - Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
 - Hand hygiene is effective against the virus. In these circumstances, gloves are not needed if the priest performs hand hygiene.

- **Communion on the tongue vs. in the hand:** We have carefully considered the question of Communion on the tongue vs. Communion in the hand. Given the Church’s existing guidance on this point (see [*Redemptionis Sacramentum*](#), no. 92), and recognizing the differing judgments and sensibilities that are involved, we believe that, with the precautions listed here, it is possible to distribute on the tongue without unreasonable risk.
 - Opinions on this point are varied within the medical and scientific community: some believe Communion on the tongue involves an elevated and, in the light of all the circumstances, an unreasonable risk; others disagree. If Communion on the tongue is provided, one could consider using hand sanitizer after each communicant who receives on the tongue.
- The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer. (He may also arrange for an ablution cup to be on the table, and may purify his fingers in the ablution cup before using hand sanitizer.) He may repeat this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual contact.
- After receiving Holy Communion, the faithful move towards the exit, to another area marked with tape on the floor to indicate proper spacing. A brief period of silence should ensue to permit each person to say a prayer of thanksgiving.
- The priest then offers a concluding prayer as provided in the Rite. For example:

“Let us pray. O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament have left us a memorial of your Passion, grant us, we pray, so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood that we may always experience in ourselves the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”
- He then gives a blessing in the normal way and dismisses the people with: *“Go in the peace of Christ.”*
- The group exits the church by a separate door, and the usher lets in the next group of the faithful.