



DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

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TO: Pastors, Deacons and Pastoral Administrators

FROM: Most Reverend Steven J Raica

PROTOCOLS FOR REOPENING CHURCHES FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP AS OF May 20, 2020

These protocols are given to support, clarify and give direction for the opening of our churches once again for public worship. Our parishes vary widely around the diocese and so each pastor must determine, with the help of staff and council members, how best to implement the following protocols. These are given not as suggestions but as undertakings that must be done to protect the health and safety of all people. There is room for each parish to figure out individually how to best implement the protocols contained within this document. As a diocese we can achieve unity without uniformity.

The first consideration must be for the health and safety of all people: the lay faithful, religious and clergy. This is especially true for the most vulnerable members of our population, including the elderly and those with chronic illnesses. **All parishes must follow the recommendations of the CDC and the state and federal guidelines for health and safety.**

The return to public Masses will happen in phases. These phases will be marked by dates and/or benchmarks of medical advances. The threat of the coronavirus is still very much with us. We must realize that social distancing, the wearing of masks and increased cleaning procedures will be with us for the foreseeable future. All of this will impact the way we worship and the rituals which are a vital part of our faith. We must adopt a new way of thinking as we move forward.

These directives may be revised and updated depending on the coronavirus situation and the recommendations of the CDC and state guidelines.

- **Public Masses may resume with reduced capacity of 25 % or less on or after May 20, 2020.** The opening is dependent upon all the directives being in place. Please remember there is no rush to open church doors for public Masses. Health and safety come first.

The following restrictions **must** be in place before a church may open for public Mass:

BEFORE THE FIRST PUBLIC MASS

Communication to parishioners must be made before the first Mass regarding:

- All the faithful in the Diocese of Gaylord are dispensed from their Sunday obligation to attend Mass through Sunday, September 6, 2020. Those who wish to attend Mass may consider that

they have fulfilled their Sunday obligation not only on Sunday but by attending Mass any day of the week. This is for the benefit of those who are sick, and those who are vulnerable to the disease. It may also be the case that with social distancing requiring smaller church capacity, not all parishioners who wish to attend Mass will be able to attend Mass every Sunday. (Parishes may have to add Masses throughout the week and/or create a reservation/ticketing method for Masses such as using Eventbrite or Eventbee).

- Those who are symptomatic or who have been exposed to another with the virus within 14 days are not permitted to enter the church. Members of the same household are to remain home as well.
- Before coming to church, everyone is requested to take their temperature at home. If a person's temperature is at or above 100.4 (CDC guideline) they and members of their household must remain at home.
- Those who are at risk because of age (65 and older) or because of an underlying health issue are strongly encouraged to remain at home for the sake of their own health. Those who are not comfortable being in public for any reason at this time are also encouraged to remain home. Live-streamed Masses in the diocese will continue.
- If a priest is at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 due to age or health issues, he should continue to celebrate Mass privately but refer the celebration of public Mass to another priest.
- Encourage parishioners to bring their own hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should be used before and after receiving Communion.
- The faithful **are required** to wear a mask. (Masks should not be worn by children under the age of two). Face masks are for one's own protection and to protect other people. Pastors are required to ensure these directives are enforced.
- The faithful should be instructed that reception of Communion is encouraged to be by the hand. They should be instructed to hold out their hands carefully so the Communion minister may safely place the Blessed Sacrament into their hands without touching them. The wearing of gloves is prohibited during reception of the Eucharist.
- The priest should let those who are receiving on the tongue know there may be special instructions for them. During this time, compliance with these instructions is an act of charity toward those who may fear following them in the Communion line and toward the minister of Communion (e.g., receive last or have a separate line).

- The faithful should be instructed so as to understand these directives are temporary and subject to change and will be modified as the situation changes.

Outdoor Masses

Weather permitting, and given the pastoral necessity, Mass and other prayer services may be celebrated outdoors on church grounds to allow for more people to participate.

- This can relieve parishes from having to clean and sanitize the church building. Public Masses could resume even when the church is not yet ready to hold them.
- Appropriate physical distance must be maintained for individuals and family units.
- The same precautions used for indoor Masses need to be used for outdoor Masses (e.g., washing hands, not passing a collection basket).
- It is preferred to have participants sitting in chairs and not in cars where visibility may be limited. If people are in cars an elevated platform would be necessary to increase visibility.
- People should bring their own chairs. If the parish provides chairs they must be sanitized before and after Mass.
- Communion distribution needs to follow the same protocols as for indoor Masses and needs to be well planned. If people are in cars, it is preferred that they exit the cars to receive Holy Communion, in a controlled manner to form lines.

Facilities preparations

Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of the church must take place before the first Mass and then after every Mass or use by the public. Please go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>. This link includes how to disinfect and where to disinfect.

- The pastor should establish a sanitizing and cleaning team. A schedule should be created and maintained to ensure sanitization between uses of the church.
- A thorough cleaning and disinfecting must take place of all surfaces that the public will come in contact with during Mass or other uses of the building.
- Provisions are to be made for adequate ventilation during Mass. Air conditioning should be turned on or windows and doors opened to promote increased ventilation. Please have the maximum amount of fresh air circulating that the building can provide.

- All hymnals, missalettes, Mass cards and envelopes **must be** removed. No materials are to be in the pews.
- To prepare for public worship at this time, pastors are asked to **limit attendance to no more than 25%** of church seating capacity.
 - People are to be seated in a way to maintain a 6-foot distance in every direction. Family units may sit together without distancing among themselves.
 - Every other pew is to remain empty.
 - The 6-foot distance needs to be maintained for the Communion line between individuals and family units. (This may require churches that normally have 2 lines down the center aisle to reduce it to one single line).
- The new capacity limitations are to be communicated to parishioners so they are aware before they arrive there may not be adequate space in the church and may have to be turned away and asked to come to Mass on a different day/time.
- Please consider other means to increase capacity such as a closed-circuit large television in the parish hall or gym where chairs can be set up at least 6 feet apart in all directions.
- Baptismal fonts and Holy Water stoops are to remain empty until further notice.
- Hand sanitizers should be available for parishioner use even though they are encouraged to bring their own.
- All cry rooms that are small and have limited ventilation should be closed until further notice.

Safety and hygiene when the church is opened for use

All areas within the church that are used **must be** wiped down with disinfectant after each liturgy and after each use of the worship space (e.g., adoration).

- Pews, chairs, ambos, microphones must be sanitized after every liturgy. Lectionaries and the Roman Missal should be wiped down if possible without causing damage.
- Hand rails, door handles, push plates and knobs must be wiped down after each liturgy and use of the space. Some doors might be propped open for less contact.
- Restrooms must be sanitized after each liturgy and frequently during the week.

- Drinking fountain handles and spouts need to be sanitized.

DURING MASS

- Priests and deacons must maintain six-foot distance from attendees and are not to greet people by contact before or after Mass.
- Liturgical ministers do not need to wear masks while in the sanctuary (lectors, deacons, priests and servers). The use of servers should be minimal.
- A server should not hold the Roman Missal for the celebrant at the chair. The Missal should be placed on a lectern or other stand.
- Strategies should be devised to minimize interactions among ministers in the sanctuary (e.g., cruets and the lavabo could be on a credence table set near the altar).
- Entry and exit doors must be designated and monitored. In order to prevent people from touching doors, as much as possible, the doors are to be propped or held open for people to walk in and out of church.
- Ushers or others designated must keep count of individuals entering the church and supervise the 6-foot rule between family units. When the seating capacity has been reached, the usher must direct people to the hall or gym where live-streaming will take place or invite people to return for the next Mass that day or during the week.
- Ushers are to assist people finding designated seating areas. (Seating areas for families might be separated from seating for single people, etc.).
- The music is to be led by the musician and cantor only. Because the faithful will be wearing masks, singing by the assembly may be challenging and ineffective. Antiphons could be used for the entrance and recessional and sung by the cantor only. Familiar hymns with people singing the refrain only or in a “call and response” like psalms should be considered.
 - The omission of singing may be considered to shorten the time of Mass to reduce potential exposure.
- The Offertory Procession of Gifts is suspended.

- Collection baskets are not to be passed from one person to another. Stationary baskets are to be used for donations, and are to be monitored by the ushers during Mass and handled according to protocols in place for handling the collection.
- Each priest is to have his own paten with host and his own chalice for consecration. The hosts for the assembly are to be in separate ciboria. Enough ciboria are to be prepared for each Communion station before Mass.
- The hosts for the faithful should be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer.
- Holding hands during the Our Father is not permitted.
- The Sign of Peace is suspended.
- For the distribution of Communion, ushers, wearing masks, are to help ensure the 6-foot distancing in the Communion line if necessary. (If tape is placed on the floor, ushers may not be needed).
- Those distributing Communion must wear masks, but cannot wear gloves, and must be trained in how to distribute Communion without touching. They must sanitize their hands immediately before and after the distribution of communion to all communicants. Hand sanitizer must be available at each station for the person distributing Communion to utilize in the moment in case incidental contact is made with a communicant. (A small table should be placed at each Communion station, with an unfolded corporal and the bottle of hand sanitizer).
- Distribution of the Precious Blood **is prohibited**. For those who are gluten intolerant, special arrangements are to be made with the pastor.
- It is suggested that before people form the Communion line the celebrant says to the whole assembly, "The Body of Christ." All respond "Amen." This will eliminate the need for speaking between the communicant and Communion minister.
- When approaching for Holy Communion, communicants are to pull their mask below their chins and present their hands. The communicant reverently places the Eucharist in his or her mouth and immediately replaces their mask.
- An alternate plan to distribute Communion is to do so after Mass. The priest (and deacon) would consume in the normal way. The consecrated hosts are placed in the tabernacle. After the concluding blessing and dismissal, the priest and deacon remain in the sanctuary and remove chasuble and dalmatic. A small table with a small unfolded corporal and hand sanitizer is placed

at each Communion station. All who will distribute now sanitize their hands. The Eucharist is retrieved from the tabernacle by the priest or deacon and placed on the altar. Holding up a single host the priest 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.”* The people respond as usual (Lord, I am not worthy...). The priest and deacon go to their stations. After people have received, they may exit the church in a controlled and socially distanced manner and say a prayer of Thanksgiving in the car. Anyone who wishes to receive on the tongue would receive last. The remaining hosts are placed in the tabernacle.

- After the distribution of Communion, extraordinary ministers are to pour a little water into their ciborium for remaining particles to dissolve. (After Mass the priest, deacon or instituted acolyte will pour the water down the sacrarium once all particles have dissolved. Then the vessels may be washed).

AFTER MASS

- Communication with parishioners should be done electronically or posted on a parish website/social media, or by phone. Paper bulletins may be distributed if necessary but only after Mass by ushers wearing gloves (and a mask). Bulletins should not be available before Mass for people to take on their own.
- Ushers will need to assist with people exiting the church so as to maintain social distancing between family units. A plan **must be** prepared for the safe exiting from pews to outside.
- Priests and deacons are to return to the sacristy immediately.
- No receptions or gatherings are allowed after Mass.
- Pews, etc. are to be wiped down before the next Mass. Trash is to be removed and all leftover items in the pews are to be removed.
- Bathrooms must be sanitized before the next Mass.