

Catholic Mutual... " CARES"

Return to Mass

Once it is determined that State/Local directives are gradually going to allow larger gatherings in your state/community, you may be able to offer Mass to a limited number of worshippers. Do not assume the spread of the virus has diminished because of these new guidelines. We should maintain and continue our precautionary measures to ensure we are protecting one another from the spread of COVID-19. It will be important to monitor any increase of COVID-19 cases in your community. In addition to the CDC and your State/Local Health Department recommendations, the following guidelines should be considered for everyone's safety as you gradually reopen the church for worship.

General Recommendations

- Parishioners and all church staff should be reminded if they are considered "high risk," and more vulnerable to the virus, they should consider not attending Mass in the church and continue to participate in virtual or televised Mass.
- If a parishioner is ill or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, they should not attend mass. The church should post a link to the COVID-19 exposure questions on their website (i.e., have you traveled out of the country, do you have a fever, have you been exposed to someone with COVID-19, etc.?). Consider posting signage on entrance door asking anyone with a fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the church.
- In an effort to reduce exposure, the number of ushers, greeters, altar servers and/or volunteers should be limited for each Mass.
- The use of facemasks should be encouraged, if not mandated by civil authority.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances.
- Social distancing of people not living in the same household should be followed. You will need to establish how many parishioners can be in the church for Mass. Identify areas on your designated pews that represent a 6' distance in seating. Using non-slip tape or another product to make this separation would be helpful. Keep in mind this may not be suitable for family seating. When seating a family, the usher will need to be certain the 6' distance is adhered to between the family and the next parishioner(s).
- A minimum of every other pew should be followed or every third pew is preferred to maintain the recommended 6' social distancing.

- May want to consider assigning your parishioners to masses to reduce the chance of crowding. For example, parishioners whose last names begin with A - D, could attend the first Mass of the day. Other options to consider would be a sign-up system or assigning a mass time per registered family. Additional masses may be needed, if possible.
- You may consider several shorter masses be conducted throughout the day to minimize the time of exposure to parishioners. Adequate time between masses should be allowed to avoid overcrowding and provide ample time to disinfect and clean the interior of the church.
- Consideration should be given to keeping holy water fonts emptied.
- Consider the removal of all Missals, Bibles, prayer cards, etc. from the pews. Parish bulletins should be posted to the parish website or emailed to parishioners.
- Collection baskets should not be passed person-to-person. Ideally, a large basket could be placed at church exit for parishioners to drop envelopes or donations.
- Your building(s) should have properly functioning HVAC systems to ensure adequate ventilation. In addition, you may consider opening windows during Mass if applicable.

Control of Foot Traffic

- Before and after Mass, do not allow people to assemble and socialize outside/inside of church.
- It may be necessary to install temporary markings (cones/tape), directing the flow of foot traffic in and out of the church. Only one entrance into the church is recommended to ensure control of the number of individuals entering the building.
- Ideally, entrance door(s) should be propped open to limit contact with door handles or an employee/volunteer may hold open doors.
- Orderly seating and dismissal is encouraged. The first parishioners arriving should be ushered to front of church and fill in the rest of the seating areas as more enter. Orderly exiting should start at the back of church and work towards the front.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Clean and disinfect the church, including restrooms, after each Mass. Should pay special attention to frequently touched surfaces (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.). See *Cleaning and Disinfecting* CARES document.
- To prevent additional cleaning and help control the spread, the church should close off any rooms/areas not needed to reduce access to these areas. Restrooms should be cleaned between masses.

It is recommended that daily updates from the CDC and your State/Local Health Departments are heeded and procedures updated as needed. Please refer to the CDC's website at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

Distribution of Holy Communion

Communion will be at the direction of the Arch/Bishop. Keep in mind, Communion may be challenging to ensure it can be done safely while trying to balance social distancing, parishioners wearing masks, etc. Examples of directives from dioceses that have already opened are shown below.

Example 1

1. Communion is to be distributed only by the priest(s) and vested permanent or transitional deacon. If the presider is a priest in a higher-risk category (age/pre-existing condition), then a designated Extraordinary Minister could be used.
2. Hand sanitizer is to be used before the distribution of Communion. If inadvertent contact is made, the priest or deacon is to stop and sanitize his hands before continuing to distribute Communion. It may be prudent to have a small table with the proper items for sanitizing nearby.
3. Communion is to be received ONLY in the HAND.
4. Communion will not be distributed by the Cup.
5. Social distancing of a minimum of 6 feet between people not living in the same household must be **followed**.

Example 2

1. Those who distribute the Blessed Sacrament should do so only via the Sacred Host, and not the Precious Blood.
2. Permanent deacons who assist at Mass should receive Holy Communion via intinction.
3. Concelebrants who assist at Mass should self-communicate via intinction.
4. All those who distribute Holy Communion should wash their hands prior to the beginning of Mass and should use hand sanitizer – kept in a discreet place in the sanctuary or sacristy – immediately prior to the distribution.
5. The line for Holy Communion should be single file and maintain social distancing.
6. For those who wish to receive on the tongue, they should be invited to receive at the end of the line. Reception at the Communion rail should not take place until restrictions are lifted.

Example 3

1. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the laity is suppressed until further notice.
2. The minister of Communion wears a mask.
3. Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received with gloves. Tongs should not be used for the distribution of Holy Communion.
4. Prior to the distribution of Holy Communion, the following statement should be read:

Please listen carefully to these instructions for receiving Holy Communion. As always, Catholics in the state of grace are welcome to receive the Sacrament although no one is obliged to receive it. Those not receiving sacramentally are urged to make a spiritual communion, inviting the Lord into their hearts. When approaching for Communion, form a single line in the middle of the center aisle and remain 6 feet apart from others, observing the markings on the floor. After the priest says, "The Body of Christ" and you say, "Amen," approach the priest, stopping an arm's length from him. Although you may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, the weight of medical opinion is that it is safer to receive in the hand. If you receive in the hand, extend your arms and open your hand up fully, keep your mask on until you step away from the priest, then lower the mask to consume the Host. If you receive on the tongue, lower your mask, extend your tongue fully and then move to the side. The priest must sanitize his hands after each person who receives on the tongue; otherwise, the priest only needs to sanitize his hands if he inadvertently touches someone's hand when Communion is received in that manner. Then return to your pew by the side aisle. Since there is no offertory collection, kindly bring your offering with you as you come up the aisle and drop it in the basket before approaching the priest for Holy Communion. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

5. There will be only one station for distributing Holy Communion under the form of Bread to the congregation. It will be in the center aisle at the foot of the sanctuary. There should be a small table to the side of the priest. On this table is to be placed a corporal, a purificator(s) and a hand disinfecting product. An ablution cup could also be on this table to purify one's fingers before using the sanitizer. When a priest sanitizes his hands, he first places the ciborium on the corporal and then disinfects.
6. To assist safe social distancing, non-slip tape should mark where people stand or stop during the reception of Communion. There should be tape markers beginning with where the priest stands for the distribution of Communion hosts. Then going back, there should be tape markers every 6 feet so that communicants can maintain appropriate distancing as they process to receive Communion. There should also be a tape marker about arm's length from where

the priest stands – that will be the marker to stop and actually receive Communion from the priest.

Example 4

I. General Norms for Receiving Holy Communion on the Hand

1. Social distancing rules must be observed during the procession to and from a communicant's seat.
2. Given the safety concerns involved, it is strongly encouraged that the celebrant reminds those attending Mass of the proper way to receive Holy Communion. This reminder is designed to avoid any physical contact between the minister and the communicant.
3. The minister must make every effort to avoid touching the hand of the communicant. (see below)
4. When approaching the minister, the communicant is required:
 - a. To remove his or her facemask.
 - b. If necessary, hold the mask with one hand.
 - c. Extend the free hand forward while holding it still, allowing the minister to place the Eucharist in the palm of the open hand(s).
5. In order to minimize the possibility of contact with droplets between the communicant and minister, there are two acceptable ways to accommodate the dialogue that occurs between the communicant and the minister. The pastor of each parish is asked to choose one of these methods to be followed in his parish.
 - a. First Method: Each communicant will come forward and while retaining his or her facemask and standing in front of the minister, receive the consecrated Host from the minister. While the communicant retains his or her mask, the minister will say "Body of Christ" and the communicant will respond "Amen". The communicant will step aside, remove one side of their mask, consume the consecrated Host and return to their seat.
 - b. Second Method: While retaining a facemask, each communicant will be asked to stop 6 feet in front of the minister before coming forward to receive the Eucharist. The minister will say "Body of Christ" and the communicant will respond "Amen". The communicant will come forward, receive the Eucharist silently, and after stepping aside, remove his or her facemask and consume the consecrated Host.

II. General Norms for Those Receiving Holy Communion on the Tongue

1. Holy Communion will be distributed to those who wish to receive on the tongue in one of two distinct ways
 - a. A separate line will be formed for those receiving on the tongue or
 - b. If there is a single line, those receiving on the tongue will come up after everyone else has received Communion in the hand.
2. Social distancing rules must be observed during the procession to and from a communicant's seat and at the altar rail (if applicable)
3. Kneelers are permitted provided:
 - a. They are wooden or composed of a durable substance that allows for easy cleaning.
 - b. Provision must be made to sanitize the top of the kneeler in a reasonable time in between communicants
4. Use of a Communion Rail is permitted provided:
 - a. The places where each communicant will kneel are to be clearly marked 6 feet apart.
 - b. The rail must be disinfected with a sanitary wipe after each person leaves his or her place.

III. Requirements for Ministers Distributing Holy Communion

1. Distribution of Holy Communion in the hand
 - a. **Before Communion begins**, each minister must sanitize his or her hands.
 - b. A facemask is required for all who distribute Holy Communion. It is recommended that a minister wear either a medical mask or N95 mask.
 - c. Although there is little medical evidence that wearing gloves provides any additional protection from infection, the use of gloves is permitted by the minister.
 - d. Extra care must be taken not to touch the communicant's hand.
 - e. **During the distribution of Communion:** If the minister makes contact with the hand of the communicant, the minister will be required to sanitize his or her hand thoroughly. A table with hand sanitizer or a bowl with a solution of 70% alcohol and a towel should be placed in proximity to the minister who is distributing Communion. If alcohol is used, it must be poured down the sacrarium after the conclusion of Mass.
 - f. **After the distribution of Communion:** Each minister is required to thoroughly sanitize his or her hands. A facemask must be retained if the EME returns to a place within the assembly.

2. Distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue:

- a. **Before Communion begins**, all the requirements listed above are applicable. Also, the minister is strongly encouraged to put on a face shield. When a face shield is used, it must be removed properly after the distribution of Holy Communion. The use of gloves by each minister is strongly encouraged.
- b. **During the distribution of Communion**, the minister is required to disinfect his or her hands after each communicant who receives on the tongue. The hand used to distribute Holy Communion must be sanitized in between each communicant using the sanitizing method mentioned above. The procedure is the same whether the minister wears a glove or not.
- c. **After distributing Communion**, the minister is asked to properly remove face shield (if used) and mask. Hands must be thoroughly sanitized.

To further assist you when considering a return to Mass, please see the following link for additional guidance on the Decision Tree chart as established by the World Health Organization (WHO).

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-tree-religious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a_2

Should you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact your Risk Management Representative.