

General Guidelines for Resumption of Public Worship with a Congregation

In order to resume public worship with the participation of the faithful, preparations must begin in every parish to create a parish plan that addresses all its unique circumstances.

I. Fundamental Principles:

There are **seven fundamental principles** which must guide the planning process for the resumption of the public worship, especially the celebration of Mass.

- A. **First Principle:** Ensuring the **safety and health of our faithful and clergy** is of the highest importance in whatever parish plan is created.
 - a. Participation at Mass, whether indoor or outdoor will require **appropriate health safety precautions** for all who attend.

- B. **Second Principle** The **obligation to attend Sunday Mass** will remain dispensed during the initial phases of the reintroduction of Sunday worship. It is advised that all parishes continue to **live-stream Mass** during the first phases of its plan.

- C. **Third Principle** Each parish will create **a parish plan with distinct stages to be phased-in over time**, with each stage demonstrating its functionality and success in securing the safety and health of the clergy and faithful of the parish.
 - a. Each phase of reopening will require its own planning and set the foundation for the next phase which will envision a larger number of people to participate at Mass.
 - b. Each stage of parish planning must be written and submitted for **review** to the local dean.

- D. **Fourth Principle** Each parish can use as a starting reference in its planning the **religious exemption** that allows up to **50 people** to assemble for worship, provided that **all other state mandates are also observed**.
 - a. Since social distancing will be required for the foreseeable future, each parish must determine **the maximum number of worshippers that can safely assemble in any indoor space designated for worship**.
 - i. All those who are involved in the liturgy, including the celebrant, must be included in whatever maximum number is determined for those who can attend a given Mass celebration.
 - b. In any outdoor venue, the number 50 remains in effect for those people who leave their vehicles and assemble either in a seated or standing position.
 - c. The **number of parked cars** from which parishioners can attend Mass will vary depending upon three factors:
 - i. The size of the parish parking lot;
 - ii. The need to maintain six feet between parked cars;

iii. Maintaining the ability for any car to exit freely from the lot in case of emergency.

- E. **Fifth Principle:** Maintaining the **integrity of the celebration of Mass** must be safeguarded in any plan. This means that only those options provided in the Roman Missal can be adopted as legitimate practice in any parish plan.
- F. **Sixth Principle: Proper Record keeping** must be established in every parish that documents compliance with established protocols for sanitation and safety.
- G. **Seventh Principle:** If a pastor wishes to reintroduce **weekday Masses** attended by the faithful, he will be required to observe the same provisions that govern the celebration of Sunday Masses.

II. Four factors that must factored into any parish plan:

A. First Factor: The physical capacity and layout of the Church Building:

- a. Since “**Social distancing**” will remain in effect for the foreseeable future, any reopening of a church building will require that all seating be designated that respects this distancing requirement.
 - i. “Social distancing” requires **6 feet** of free distance in **all directions of the compass** between individuals and family units.
 - ii. All available seating must be marked off and other seating be blocked to avoid any violation of this distance.
 - iii. A family who lives together may sit together as a **single unit**. As such, this will affect the distance that must be maintained on the left and right of such a family in any given pew.
- b. Given the considerations listed above, a parish plan must clearly state the **number of people** who can be accommodated in every interior site for public worship.

B. Second Factor: Alternative sites for the celebration of Mass:

A parish plan may eventually designate one or more sites for public worship. **The same provisions established for the use of a Church building must also apply to any indoor site designated for public worship.**

Among possible sites are:

- a. **Parish Gym**
- b. **Parish Auditorium**
- c. **Outdoor Lot or Parking Lot:** Temporary permission is granted for any parish to offer Mass outdoors on its grounds or parking lot.

- d. **Other Diocesan Properties:** For those parishes who neither have sufficient space inside their church nor a large outdoor venue in which to hold public Mass, diocesan properties can be used by such parishes for the outdoor celebration of Mass.
1. Such sites include our Catholic Cemeteries or another space within the diocese (e.g. Our Lady of Good Counsel parking lot in Bridgeport) with permission of the bishop or Vicar General.
 2. Pastors are encouraged to explore these alternative diocesan sites to maximize the number of those who can attend Mass

C. **Third Factor: Ensuring the safety and health of all who attend**

a. **Health monitoring of all participants**

- i. All parishioners must be reminded that they should not come to Mass if they feel ill or display any of the symptoms associated with the Coronavirus.
- ii. If anyone (clergy or faithful) has been exposed to a person who has tested positive for the coronavirus or a person who is ill from the COVID-19 virus, they are to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- iii. Hand sanitizer dispensers are to be available at every entrance and exit of the Church building. Everyone attending Mass must sanitize their hands before entering and leaving the Church.
 - i. If the parish is unable to provide a sanitizing agent (due to lack of availability), each person attending Mass should be informed to bring their own bottle to sanitize their hands upon entrance into the Church.

b. **Use of Face Masks**

- i. Until the state requirement is lifted, **face masks that cover both the nose and mouth are required for the faithful in all public worship** except for those who attend Mass in their parked car and do not exit the vehicle for the reception of Holy Communion.
 - i. Use of a face mask is **not required** by any person who by using it, will act contrary to his or her health or safety due to a medical condition.
- ii. Each parish plan must determine how best to make such masks available. There are three options:
 - i. The purchase and distribution of such masks can be arranged by the parish as a service to those who attend
 - ii. The parish can request that parishioners bring their own masks

iii. The creation of a parish ministry that allows parishioners to create masks for distribution at Mass

c. Sanitizing Procedures

- i. Within any enclosed worship space, the following areas to be **sanitized after each celebration of Mass**. At minimum this requires the regular cleaning of:
 - i. All door handles and guard rails
 - ii. Those portions of Pews that are repeated by touched by hand
 - iii. Common Bathrooms
 - iv. Other areas designated by the pastor

d. Further Liturgical Considerations for the protection of all who attend Mass:

- i. All restrictions that were imposed in the weeks prior to the cessation of public worship remain in effect indefinitely. This includes:
 - i. The suspension of the distribution of the **cup**;
 - ii. No physical contact during the exchange of the **sign of peace**;
 - iii. **Holy water fonts** are to remain empty and sanitized;
 - iv. All **worship aids** must be disposable and discarded after each Mass;
 - v. **Hymnals** are not permitted for use and should be removed from public access.
- ii. A **centralized process for taking up the collection** must be created that avoids any passing of a basket or interchange between ushers and congregants. A central depository can be established that will require each member attending to place their donation directly within it.
- iii. During the optional outdoor start to the celebration of public Mass, the **only persons to be present in the sanctuary** are the celebrant, concelebrating priest(s), deacon(s), the cantor.
 - i. All lay readers, EMEs, choir members and altar servers should not exercise their liturgical service during the first phase of the reintroduction of public worship.

e. Other Provisions to protect those attending Mass:

- i. In order to maintain order and avoid congregating too many people in a limited space, it is **required** that some form of a **parish-based Mass reservation system** be created that will allow parishioners to sign up for Masses at their parish.

- i. This requirement is due to the possible need for contact tracing if a person attending Mass is later diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus.
 - ii. A pastor may choose to engage his staff to create and manage such a system
 - iii. An online system can also be employed to monitor reservations for any given Mass. The Diocese is ready to assist any parish to create an online parish reservation system.
- ii. It may also be necessary for a parish to create a **temporary schedule for the initial resumption of the public celebration of Mass** that allows ample time for a church building to be emptied of its participants, cleaned and prepared for the next Mass.
 - iii. **Designated Mass for the Elderly:** In those parishes that have a larger elderly population, it may be advantageous for a pastor to arrange a Mass that is designated solely for those who are “older” (perhaps 65 or older).

D. Fourth Factor: Engaging volunteers to implement the parish plan:

An adequate number of volunteers must be present to assist those attending each Mass, to answer questions and monitor compliance.

- a. All volunteers must be properly protected.
- b. It is strongly recommended that the parish keep a log of all volunteers and when they serve. This is necessary if at a later date volunteers may need to be contacted because someone present at Mass was later diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus.
- c. Given the fact that many ushers are older and considered at “high risk”, this may also be an opportunity to engage young adults in this service during these months of transition.

III. Review Process

- a. When a pastor has completed his parish plan, he is asked to submit it to his respective dean for review and comment.
- b. If the dean has any questions, he is asked to contact the Vicar General or Secretary of the Curia for assistance.