



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

15 May 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Our Easter celebrations were unusual this year. While many participated in live-streamed celebrations of the Easter Triduum and Easter Masses, it was not the celebration it would have been with the assembled people of God together to welcome the newly baptized. In fact, we continue to wait with and pray for the Elect and those who have prepared to come into the Church, but have not yet done so because of the pandemic.

I know how much people of faith are hungering for the Eucharist and I rejoice that we will be able to celebrate mass with the participation of some of the people of God present very soon. However, I do not want anyone to mistake the resumption of public masses as a sign that the Covid-19 pandemic is over, because it is not.

**On May 20 the governor of Kentucky will allow churches to open for worship and on that date I am ending the prohibition of the public celebration of Mass. All of the churches are working to implement the directives that need to be in place to resume public worship. Many churches across the diocese will resume masses by the weekend of May 23-24. Churches in Lexington, Ashland, Campton, Hazard, Jackson, Lawrenceburg, Morehead, Mt. Sterling, Owingsville, Richmond and Winchester will begin celebrating public masses on Pentecost, the weekend of May 30-31.**

Please note that this is not simply a return to how we celebrated before the outbreak of the pandemic. Churches will only be able to admit 33% of the occupancy of the building and social distancing will need to be maintained at all times. That means that on the first weekend when we return to mass, not everyone will be able to attend. Please check with your parish to find out what procedures will be used for admission to mass. We continue to strongly encourage the elderly and those in any way more vulnerable to the virus to continue to participate in live-streamed masses. People who are sick or experiencing flu-like symptoms have a responsibility to stay home and not come to mass. Parishes may have to change their usual weekend schedule and should offer options to attend mass during the week as well.

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday mass remains intact until further notice, no one should feel it is necessary to risk their own health or the health of others to attend mass at this time.

Peace and all good,

*+ John Stowe, OFM Conv.*

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.  
Bishop of Lexington

## For the Resumption of Public Masses and Other Liturgies during Covid-19<sup>1</sup>

Effective 20 May 2020, Governor Beshear has provided for the opening of houses of worship in the Commonwealth of Kentucky for worship services providing that all churches follow the “Healthy at Work: Guidelines for Places of Worship.” The **Directives** and **Guidelines** below are for all public celebrations of liturgy in the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, they incorporate the state’s guidelines as well as directives and guidelines appropriate for Catholic liturgical practices during this Covid-19 pandemic. They will be in effect until further notice.

### **DIRECTIVES** i.e. Not Optional

- Dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass continues in the Diocese of Lexington until further notice.
- Attendance at each individual Mass or liturgy is **limited to no more than 33 % of the regular occupancy** of your church. Regular occupancy number should be known. Plans must be in place for how to limit the size of gatherings.
- Social distancing of 6 feet between people not living in the same household must be followed; social distancing is to be practiced at all times and includes seating, processions, communion lines and any lines waiting for admission to the church or exiting.
- Elderly and vulnerable populations are to be encouraged to participate in the live-streamed Masses.
- Signage is to be placed on entrance doors asking anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms to not enter the church.
- Masks are to be worn by the congregation. Masks are to be worn by ministers at all times when not speaking, reading or singing as part of their ministry.
- Holy water fonts are to remain empty.
- Hand sanitizer is to be available at least at church entrances and preferably in additional places.
- There is to be no physical contact during the Lord’s Prayer or during the Sign of Peace.
- Priests, liturgical ministers and sacristans must wash/sanitize hands before and after mass and before and after the distribution of Communion.
- Hand sanitizer is to be used before the distribution of Communion. If inadvertent contact (i.e. hand touching hand) is made, the minister of Communion is to stop and sanitize hands before continuing the distribution. Having a place to set the ciborium and have access to sanitizer nearby would be helpful.
- Gloves are not to be worn by the ministers or recipients of communion.
- Communion is distributed only in the form of Bread and given to communicants only in the hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Directives apply to Funerals and Weddings, celebrated with or without mass.

- Assembly is to be instructed that there will be no vocal words at the distribution of communion, the minister will hold up the sacred host and the communicant will bow.
- Songbooks, prayer cards and other items are to be removed from the pews.
- Frequently touched surfaces in the church are to be cleaned and sanitized after every liturgy (e.g. pews, door handles, microphones, etc.)
- There will be no Children's Liturgy of the Word, post-Mass social or other gatherings.
- No choirs. Cantors and musicians are allowed with social distancing; the state is asking us to limit (if not eliminate) congregational singing.
- Ushers and hospitality ministers are to wear masks and not make physical contact with congregants.
- No offertory procession; bread and wine remain in sanctuary and covered before being placed on the altar. Hosts to be consecrated for the people are to be placed on the altar in such a way that the priest is not speaking directly over them during the Eucharistic prayer; his own host is to be separate.
- No passing of collection baskets or plates. Receptacles should be placed near entrances or in clearly identified places for receiving offerings. Persons who handle envelopes or cash are to carefully wash hands afterwards. Offertory counters are to wear gloves and masks for their own protection.
- Sacristans and those who assist in preparing communion elements must carefully wash their hands and wear facemasks when in contact with bread and wine.
- Concelebrants and deacons are not to share from the same chalice.
- No paper bulletins are to be distributed.
- Any greetings after mass by the celebrant and/or deacons will still require social distancing
- Restrooms are to be limited to one person at a time and must be cleaned between masses.

#### **GUIDELINES** at the Discretion of Parish Leadership

- Create a system to organize limited Mass attendance: e.g. alphabetically by household name; electronic sign up systems, first-come, first served; etc. Ushers or other designated persons should know in advance the procedures for overflow.
- Encourage weekday Mass attendance as an alternative for elderly, other vulnerable persons who insist on attending.
- The Sunday readings and prayers may be repeated on weekdays when there isn't a major feast or solemnity; this may be helpful in encouraging people to come on a day other than Sunday.
- Either continue to offer live-streamed masses or refer elderly and vulnerable members to times and sites where such Masses are available.
- It is permissible for this time to distribute Holy Communion after the final blessing, as this may assist in maintaining social distancing as people depart.
- Create exit procedures to avoid loss of social distancing at dismissal (e.g row by row).
- Provide additional places for sanitizer.

- Mark social distancing spaces (6 feet) on floor for communion lines
- Prop open entrance doors to minimize touching them.
- Use electronic bulletins, website postings.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- Determining seating arrangement that will maximize social distancing
- Availability of sufficient cleaning supplies, sanitizer
- Procedure and volunteers for cleaning between masses
- Arrange the schedule of Masses to encourage maximum distribution of congregants among the various mass times and allow for proper cleaning and sanitization between Masses. This might include additional masses where feasible, even during the week.

## SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

### Baptism:

- **Adults:** parishes will have to determine, based on the numbers to be baptized whether to further delay, whether all can be baptized in the same liturgy or if it is preferable to divide into smaller groups; in larger parishes, if not delayed these will probably have to be celebrated in a special liturgy even though the normal preference would be to have the celebration with fuller participation of the parish. To the extent possible, Sunday (any Sunday) is the preferred day for celebration. In all cases, those Elect who have reached the age of reason must be confirmed and receive the Eucharist for the first time in the same celebration. Water is to be blessed as part of the liturgy. Unless there is only one person being baptized or multiple members of the same household, immersion is not practical at this time because the water would have to be changed, and new water blessed for each baptism. In baptism by pouring, the blessed water should not be taken from the same receptacle where water from a previous baptism has been poured. The words spoken by the priest during the explanatory rites should be spoken only once for all participants when the priest is at a safe distance from those around him, including the newly baptized. Sanitization of hands should be employed as needed when touching objects and people. Sponsors/godparents could be asked to light and hold the candle and place the white garments. Masks should be used and hands sanitized by the priest before and after the laying on of hands and anointing (Confirmation).
- **Infants:** During the course of the pandemic, infant baptisms should not take place during the Sunday Mass unless there is sufficient space for social distancing for all. Group baptisms may have to be limited for the same reason and to keep the blessed water clean for each baptism. The anointing with the Oil of Catechumens is to be omitted. Water is to be blessed as part of the liturgy. The blessed water should not be taken from the same receptacle where water from a

previous baptism has been poured. The words spoken by the priest or deacon during the explanatory rites should be spoken only once for all participants when the minister is at a safe distance from those around him, including the newly baptized. Sanitization of hands should be employed as needed when touching objects and people. Sponsors/godparents could be asked to light and hold the candle and place the white garments. The *ephphatha* rite is to be omitted. Masks should be used and hands sanitized by the priest before and after the anointing with Chrism.

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### **Confirmation apart from Baptism:**

- **Those being received into the Church:** Priests already enjoy the faculty to confirm them at any time. Similar to the Elect, parishes will have to determine, based on the numbers to be confirmed whether to further delay the reception, whether all the candidates can be received and confirmed in the same liturgy or if preferable to divide into groups; in larger parishes, if not delayed these will probably have to be celebrated in a special liturgy even though the normal preference would be to have the celebration with more of the parish represented. To the extent possible, Sunday (any Sunday) is the preferred day for celebration.
- **Youth and Adults already part of the Catholic Church:** Again it will be a pastoral decision whether to delay the sacrament until it can be safely celebrated with a larger assembly or whether to divide those prepared for the sacrament into smaller groups. For those parishes that prefer to form smaller groups of confirmandi, pastors may request and will be given the faculty to confirm in these instances. The request will need to be in writing and specific to each occasion. The bishop will make his schedule as flexible as possible to accommodate revised confirmation planning; it is unlikely that he would be able to celebrate more than two confirmations at any particular parish.

### **First Communions:**

- If celebrated during the course of the pandemic, communion will only be given under the species of bread and in the hand. While Sunday parish Masses are usually preferable occasions for First Communion, it can be celebrated on any day. Parishes may choose to spread First Communions over a long series of Sundays based on the number of participants or create special Masses for this purpose. First Communions should only be celebrated during Mass, not during communion services.

## **RECONCILIATION:**

For the foreseeable future, safe distancing of six feet between penitent and priest must be maintained. Reconciliation should take place in a soundproof setting.

## **ANOINTING OF THE SICK:**

Priests should be as generous as possible in offering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick while maintaining social distancing for all of the rite except the laying on of hands and the actual anointing. A cotton ball can be used for the anointing, and hand sanitization should precede and follow any contact. In hospitals, nursing facilities and other institutions the directives of the facility are to be followed. Older or priests susceptible to illness should seek the assistance of other priests to cover for them.

## **MARRIAGE:**

Follow the special directives as described for Mass, whether the mass is celebrated or not.

## **GENERAL:**

- In all sacramental celebrations, consideration should be given to live-streaming in order to reduce the number of people in actual attendance.
- Ministry to the homebound should be exercised with care to maintain social distancing, use of masks and hand sanitizer. Ministers to the homebound should not be in the vulnerable category.
- Karen Rood in the Office of Worship is in contact with colleagues around the region and can be a resource for particular questions or circumstances.
- The bishop is willing to discuss particular needs and special circumstances as needed. No permissions for variations from these norms will be given over the phone, the request and response will have to be in writing (e-mail is fine for this purpose).
- There can be no exemptions from social distancing requirements.