

The current pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all connected to each other, for better or for worse. Therefore, to emerge from this crisis better than before, we have to do so together. It is either done together, or not done at all. We must do it together, all of us, in solidarity.

Pope Francis, General Audience, September 2, 2020

The Easter season reminds us of the call to new life and hope that come to us in the risen Christ.

Although we see great signs of hope as we begin to emerge from the COVID pandemic, we must continue to be vigilant. As Pope Francis reminds us, to emerge from this crisis better than before, we must work in solidarity.

In a spirit of solidarity and genuine solicitude for the well-being of God's People, we invite full and consistent adherence to these diocesan directives.

COVID 19 – Diocesan Directives and Helpful Information

Effective April 10, 2021

1. Please encourage those who are able to return to participate in person
2. The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will continue for the foreseeable future.
3. Bishop Byrne strongly encourages people in vulnerable populations, especially the elderly and those with complicating medical conditions, to continue watching Mass from their home on their parish's social media sites or via the "Chalice of Salvation" or other available platforms.
4. Guidelines issued by the Diocese of Springfield adhere to COVID 19 Guidelines established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Failure to comply with these guidelines places people at considerable risk. Failure to comply with these guidelines also subjects our churches to possible sanctions/closure by local authorities.

MASSES

- A clear understanding of your church's seating capacity is very important. Although church capacity has been increased to 50%, six feet of social distancing between persons not of the same household must still be maintained.
- Masks which cover the mouth and nose must be worn at Mass.
- Protocols for sanitization of hands and churches remain unchanged.
- There should be no physical contact during the Sign of Peace. The Sign of Peace may be exchanged by a simple wave, smile, or bowing of the head.
- Deacons have permission to resume full participation in the liturgy. This includes preparation of the altar.

- Readers (Lectors) are allowed.
- Special Ministers of the Eucharist are allowed.
- Only the priest may receive the Precious Blood from the chalice. Deacons and laity may not receive the Precious Blood.
- Regardless of vaccination status, all persons distributing Holy Communion must wear a mask. This includes priests and deacons.
- Altar Servers are allowed.
 - Servers must wear masks at all times – especially while in the sanctuary -- and carefully sanitize hands.
- The Entrance Procession may take place as normal.
- Water fonts are to remain empty and closed.
- Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful either on the tongue or in the hand.
 - In both cases, special precautions should be maintained to avoid direct physical contact with the communicant.
 - If the priest-celebrant does not feel comfortable distributing Holy Communion on the tongue, he should make an announcement in his parish.
 - Some parishes in our diocese came up with helpful solutions:
 - Ask those who would like to receive on the tongue to come forward at the end of the Communion line.
 - Invite those wishing to receive Holy Communion on the tongue to do so immediately after Mass.
- Holy Communion should now be distributed at the usual time and not at the end of Mass.
 - The faithful should have time for private prayer after receiving Holy Communion.
 - They should not be rushed out of the church.
- We are resuming all customary liturgical postures such as sitting, kneeling, and standing.
- The congregation (with masks in place at all times) may sing at Mass.
 - Singing and music are constitutive of “full and active participation” in the liturgy.
 - Nonetheless, please choose shorter songs or sing only a few verses, remembering that the ability to breathe/sing is impacted by a mask.
- Choir members who feel comfortable doing so may sing in a choir loft or designated choir area removed from the congregations without masks. At all times, choir members must maintain social distancing.
- Missalettes should not be left in pews or in church vestibules.
 - Pastors/Administrators who feel a pressing pastoral need for missalettes are encouraged to give each parishioner a missalette to take back and forth from home each week or visit <https://www.usccb.org/> for online version.

- Parish Bulletins may be distributed by volunteers who sanitized their hands or are wearing gloves.
 - Parishioners should be encouraged to read the parish bulletin online.
- Priests and deacons may greet congregants at the end of Mass.
 - Social distancing must be maintained while greeting congregants. Physical contact is to be avoided.

PARISH MEETINGS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

- Parish-related meetings may be held in-person.
 - In mid-March, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts expanded indoor and outdoor capacity limits. For non-worship gatherings, the new limit is 100 people indoors and 150 outdoors.
 - Attendees must wear masks and maintain social distancing.
 - No food or drink may be served.
 - Sanitizing/cleaning protocol must be in place. This includes a thorough cleaning after each meeting of the space used.
- Support Groups (12 Step Meetings, Etc.) may resume use of parish facilities.
 - No food or drink may be served.
 - Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart.
 - Face masks covering the mouth and nose must be worn.
 - Proper ventilation must be in place.
 - Signs must be posted reminding attendees of the importance of social distancing, mask-wearing, hand washing, and staying home if feeling ill.
 - Group organizer is responsible for cleaning and disinfecting before and after the meeting according to CDC protocols.

FOOD PANTRIES/TAKE & EAT

- Parish programs involving the distribution of food for the needy and homebound are permitted.
 - Participants must wear masks and maintain social distancing.
 - A sanitizing/cleaning protocol must be in place, which includes a thorough cleaning of any space utilized.

PARISH FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

(Tag Sales, Meals-to-Go, Other Fundraising Initiatives)

- When sponsoring fundraising events, state and local directives must be carefully followed, including capacity limits.
 - Masks covering mouth and nose must be worn.
 - Social distancing must be maintained.
 - No receptions, parties or consumption of food/beverages are allowed on site.
 - Food offerings are on a “to go” basis only.
 - No carnival rides or similar activities
 - No in-person concerts or choral events.
 - No Bingo.
 - A sanitizing/cleaning protocol must be in place. This includes a thorough cleaning of the spaces used.

Private Prayer

- Churches and chapels may remain open for private prayer for extended hours at the discretion of the pastor/administrator.

Funerals, Weddings

- Please follow the guidelines for Masses.

Baptisms

- Social distancing and mask wearing must be enforced.
- Priests/Deacons should carefully sanitize hands before and after administering the sacrament.

Confirmations

- If a pastor/administrator wishes to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation in his parish, a letter requesting faculties should be sent to the Ordinary.
- The oil of chrism should not be wiped away after the anointing.
- There is no need for the minister of the sacrament to sanitize his hands between anointings.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

- If the anointing takes place in a hospital or other healthcare facility, the specific protocols established by that facility must be followed. These include wearing of gowns, masks, gloves, etc.

Communion to the Homebound

- Parishes may resume Communion Calls, provided that the Minister of Communion is fully vaccinated.
 - These calls should be brief, just long enough to bring the Sacrament; extended visits are to be avoided.
 - The minister must wear a mask and must disinfect his or her hands before and after giving Communion. Hands should also be disinfected after leaving the home.
 - If it is feasible, the communicant should wear a mask.
 - Family members who are Extraordinary Ministers of Communion may continue to bring the Blessed Sacrament to members of their own families regardless of the Extraordinary Minister's vaccination status.

With questions please contact Very. Rev. Piotr Calik

Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia at

413-452-0610 or p.calik@diospringfield.org

God Bless and Happy Easter Season