

**Diocese of Des Moines**  
**Sacramental Guidelines during COVID-19**  
**Updated Nov 12, 2020**

As we continue to journey through the present pandemic together, more and more we realize that the present virus will not be going away any time soon. And yet, as a community of faith, we need to reach out to our people, not just in material ways, but in spiritual ways. The Church has always taught that the faithful have a right to the sacraments, but, as we have seen in recent days, this must be balanced with a consideration of the common good.

As the Diocese continues in our regathering program, the guidelines for sacramental and liturgical celebrations will reflect the phase in which a parish finds itself. Prior to entering phase one, parishes are limited to celebrations of ten people or less. Upon entering phase one, parishes may begin to gather more people. Throughout this document, the liturgical and cleaning guidelines already in force are presumed.

Social distancing norms will likely dictate the number of faithful who can attend any gathering. As such, livestreaming may need to be part of any plans that are made for any liturgical or sacramental celebration.

These preliminary notes and guidelines will be updated as information becomes more current and conditions develop.

**CHRISTIAN INTIATION OF ADULTS**

**The Elect**

Realizing the strong desire of the Elect to receive the Easter Sacraments after this prolonged period of Election, parishes which have entered phase one may reasonably begin to make preparation for the celebration of the Easter Sacraments.

In consultation with the RCIA team, the pastor should consider first consider whether the parish is in a position to initiate all the elect at once, or whether they will need to be divided into groups. This may be necessary to allow a representation of the faithful to attend the initiation ceremony and so represent the community which receives the newly initiated.

Bishop Joensen has dispensed with 2 of the scrutinizes in accord with #20 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Pastors should make plans to celebrate 1 of the scrutinies (they may freely select one) with the RCIA team. This may be done either in a simple daily Mass or in a liturgy of the word outside of Mass with the Elect, their sponsor, and representatives of the RCIA team. The oral presentation of the Creed and Lord's Prayer may also be done at this celebration.

The initiation of the Elect should be done with as much of a representation of the community as allowed. The pastor may consider doing this at a regularly scheduled daily Mass (if the parish is

in phase one) or at a specially arranged Mass with the Elect, their sponsor, members of the RCIA team, and family members invited (in accordance with the numbers allowed for the parish's celebration of daily Mass, and the current phase of weekday versus weekend Mass).

As we were able to celebrate the Rite of Election as a Diocese, the Abbreviated Version of Initiation should not be used. Pastors should instead follow the usual Rite beginning with number 218 of RCIA.

Permission is given for the Elect to receive Holy Communion under both species if they can be provided with their own chalice for communion.

(See below for notes on Baptism and Confirmation)

### **Those preparing for reception into full communion**

As with the Elect, pastors may begin to receive candidates for full communion into the Church. They should endeavor to make provisions for a representative attendance of as many from the community as possible, with special consideration given to the RCIA team and any family of the candidates. "Private" celebrations with only a handful of people are less than ideal as they sacraments naturally have a community aspect to them.

Pastors may choose to receive and confirm candidates at any regularly scheduled daily Mass in their parish, or a special Mass on any day scheduled –as permitted by the parish's current phase– with the candidate, the RCIA team, sponsors, and family. It may be necessary to do several such celebrations. Pastors should observe the current head count limits are for their parishes when scheduling and inviting people to these celebrations.

Permission is given for the candidates to receive Holy Communion under both species if they can be provided with their own chalice for communion.

### **Infant Baptisms**

As parishes enter phase one, pastors may begin to schedule baptisms with families.

These may be celebrated any day of the week, during weekday Mass or outside of Masses on a weekend (during phase one). Face coverings are recommended for all in attendance, and required for those who will be unable to social distance (celebrant, godparents, and parents). Children under 5 do not need a mask. The pastor may choose to skip the anointing with the oil of catechumens. The anointing with Chrism may be done either by pouring the oil on the crown of the head, or as usual with the thumb. Gloves should not be used. The Ephatha should only be done by means of a general gesture towards the infant's senses. As much as possible, the celebrant should minimize touching the child.

### **Confirmations**

As parishes commence phase one, pastors may begin to consider scheduling the celebration of confirmations. These may need to be done in smaller groups, at different daily Masses. As mentioned above, the principal of community celebration should be considered whenever possible. Regarding the anointing, in a letter dated June 2, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments wrote, “The use by the minister of an instrument (gloves, cotton swab, etc...) does not affect the validity of the Sacrament.” Additionally the sponsor may place their hand on the clothed shoulder of the candidate, or they may simply extend their hand towards the candidate. This gesture has no bearing on the validity of the sacrament.

### **First Communions**

Pastors may begin to celebrate First Communions as they enter phase one. These may be done at regularly scheduled weekday Masses, or by specially scheduled Masses on any day as permitted in the parish’s current phase. It is likely that in order to maintain social distancing, first communion may have to be scheduled in smaller groups and not as an entire class. Permission is given for the first communicants to receive communion under both species if they can be provided with their own chalice for communion.

### **Weddings**

Weddings may take place in accord with the guidelines of the phase which the parish finds itself in. Attendance will naturally be limited by the social distancing capacity of the Church. Social distancing must be observed, in as much as possible throughout the service. Groomsmen and bridesmaids may need to be stationed in new locations. In phase one, only the wedding is permitted. No social gathering of any sort may take place on parish property. The music limitations on phase one apply to weddings.

### **Funerals**

Pastors should work with their local funeral director to make sure they are apprised of parish guidelines. Presently, when a parish enters phase one, they may begin to celebrate funerals with the same restrictions on daily Masses as found in the phase one guidelines. Pastors may wish to consider celebrating ‘family only’ funerals when there are family members traveling to the funeral from outside the community in order to mitigate the chances of intercommunity spread. Visitations are not permitted on Church property in phase one and until further notice. Likewise, funeral luncheons may not be served on Church property during phase one and until further notice. Social distancing must be observed during the funeral. All guests, especially any from out of town, are strongly urged to wear masks. Parishes may consider establishing ‘seating zones’ separating family from local guests. Family units are to be seated 6 feet apart, following the parish’s social distancing seating plan. Due to the risk of cross contamination, any sharing/eulogy should be done at from a place other than the ambo. Pastors are encouraged to be upfront with families about the limitations early in the planning process. If a parish presently in phase one is forced to ‘pull back’ from the celebration of daily Mass, the pastor may proceed with an already planned funeral with only family in attendance and strict social distancing observed.