



Diocese of Des Moines

## **Phase 1 Regathering Guidelines**

May 15, 2020

### **General Instructions:**

Phase 1 of the diocesan regathering process will involve allowing weekday Masses (understood throughout this document as meaning Monday-Saturday morning), while the public celebration of anticipated/Sunday Masses is not yet permitted. All other gatherings of 10 or more people at the parish remain prohibited. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended.

Parishes will be allowed to resume weekday Mass as long as all required guidelines are met. When a parish cannot meet one or multiple required guidelines they cannot celebrate public weekday Masses. These guidelines will be in effect until the Diocese, or a particular region, moves to phase II, or until an escalation of the COVID-19 outbreak warrants a return to the state of all public Masses being suspended.

Parishes should follow the guidelines below, as well as the liturgical guidelines and cleaning and disinfection guidelines that accompany this document. **This document is intended for internal use only.** The diocese will share the required guidelines and the considerations immediately below with the public, and parishes are asked to do the same.

It is very important that priests reinforce forthcoming diocesan communication with the faithful, which will emphasize:

1. Participating at Mass is a health risk for any individual. For those who do not attend Mass during this time God's infinite grace and mercy remain abundantly available.
2. Parishioners should be reminded often that the Sunday obligation remains suspended, and that the elderly, vulnerable individuals, individuals who live with vulnerable individuals, and those who are ill or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 like symptoms should not attend Mass.
3. Encourage parishioners who attend Mass to cultivate an occasional presence, and not a daily presence. This is an act of charity toward others, as it can allow more people to participate in weekday Mass and better serves the common good.
4. Parishioners should only attend Mass at their own parish. Traveling to neighboring parishes creates a greater health risk for all, and hinders the diocese in its efforts to make the sacraments publicly available in the safest way possible.

### **Required Guidelines:**

For a parish to resume weekday Masses the following conditions must be met:

1. Social distancing must be maintained throughout parishioners' presence on parish property. This would entail:

- a. Instructions to maintain social distance when arriving and leaving parish property. Consider posting signage outside of the parish encouraging social distancing, and possibly even having a volunteer or usher outside of the parish to remind parishioners of this expectation. Reinforce this message as often as possible.
  - b. Possible assistance during seating, ensuring that parishioners do not bottleneck or congregate prior to Mass.
  - c. Household units should sit at least six feet apart from one another. This can be facilitated by blocking alternate pews, and asking one household unit to sit per pew.
  - d. During the reception of Holy Communion, a single communion line should be formed with at least six feet of distance between family units.
  - e. Congregants should be encouraged to leave the parish in a staggered fashion, to avoid a bottleneck or congregating after Mass.
  - f. Consider establishing one-way traffic patterns, so parishioners enter through one door and exit through another, if possible. Also, when possible prop open doors so that parishioners do not have to touch the same surfaces.
2. The worship space must be thoroughly disinfected between every Mass, following the cleaning guidelines prepared by the diocese, which are based on CDC guidance. While additional Masses might be added to lower the attendance of any individual Mass, that may be done when adequate cleaning and disinfection can occur. Other parishes might begin with two or three Masses per week.
  3. Efforts are made to make the Mass as hygienic as possible, while respecting the integrity of the liturgy. These efforts include, but are not limited to:
    - a. A suspension of the offertory procession and passing a collection basket.
    - b. A suspension of a physical exchange of peace.
    - c. A suspension of distribution from the chalice.
    - d. A modified distribution of Holy Communion (see liturgical guidelines)
  4. Parishes must remove hymnals during Mass, and no choirs are permitted. Parishes are encouraged to limit music ministers to the cantor and/or instrumentalist (singular).
  5. All ushers and volunteers are required to wear a cloth face covering or mask.
  6. If a priest cannot maintain a 15 foot distance from parishioners he is required to use a face covering or shield during the Mass. During communion ministers must wear a face covering or shield.
  7. Parishioners aged 5 and above are strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering or mask. Parishes should have extra face coverings on hand outside parish entrances. Parishes can choose to require face coverings for parishioners.

### **Recommended Guidelines:**

1. A parish should do everything possible to ensure that those who assist at Mass are not members of a vulnerable population. This would include--but is not limited to--ushers, lectors, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Many parishes will need additional ushers during Mass to assist with social distancing practices. Consider organizing a volunteer coordination team or point person who can assist in these practices.

2. Parishes should make hand sanitizer readily available for Eucharistic ministers, and may make sanitizer available for the entire congregation as they enter or depart the church.
3. Parishioners should be asked to arrive and be prepared for Mass at least 10 minutes in advance of the beginning of Mass. This will assist with seating and will help avoid potential bottlenecks at the beginning of Mass.
4. Parishes should clearly articulate all distancing and hygienic provisions to parishioners prior to Mass, on the parish website, through email, or by other means. Provisions should also be posted at the parish. Signs indicating that those who feel ill should not enter should also be posted.
5. Some parishes might wish to organize parishioners' Mass attendance in groups (alphabetically by last name, odd-even birthdates/years), or ask families to schedule attendance at Mass using programs such as Sign-Up Genius, Eventbrite, or another RSVP method. When parishioners arrive, they could check in, maintaining social distance, with an usher. If this practice is adopted clear advanced notice must be given along with instructions for RSVPs.
6. When possible prop open doors so that parishioners don't have to touch surfaces as they enter and exit.
7. Parishes should not use cry rooms, and should encourage parishioners to minimally use bathrooms, or other shared spaces.
8. Parishes should remove pamphlets, CDs, and other items for distribution from gathering space.
9. In order to ensure proper social distancing, parishes can use an adjacent hall or gym for additional seating during Mass, or if space allows could consider having Mass outdoors.
10. A plan should be in place to address situations in which:
  - a. Non-parishioners are travelling into Mass at a parish. (Note: Parishes are not encouraged to screen for non-parishioners, but this applies to obvious cases.)
  - b. A person arrives at Mass who appears to have COVID-19 symptoms
  - c. The parish reaches maximum capacity and others are still arriving for Mass
 In these situations, the diocesan policies should be explained to individuals, and they should be asked as an act of charity to not attend Mass.

### **Discouraged Practices:**

1. Parishes are discouraged from scheduling any large liturgies or events (i.e., with more than 10 persons present) without the parishioners' clear knowledge that events are contingent on the COVID-19 situation. This would include First Communions in which extended families wish to attend, baptisms, weddings, funerals or other large liturgical gatherings. The sacraments can proceed to be celebrated, but parishioners should be aware of the possibility of renewed restrictions on the gathering size. During phase one First Communions, baptisms, wedding, and funerals can be celebrated while meeting the above guidelines.
2. The diocese continues to discourage in-person meetings at parishes, and encourages the use of online platforms and remote work to accomplish parish work. If a parish is having in person meetings of under 10 people, social distancing should be practiced.

### **Prohibited Practices:**

1. **Outside of public worship, gatherings of over 10 people remain prohibited.**