

General Regathering Guidelines
Applicable during phases 1-3
Diocese of Des Moines
Updated November 12, 2020

General Instructions:

Parishes should follow the guidelines below, as well as the liturgical guidelines and cleaning and disinfection guidelines that accompany this document. 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 diocesan communication with the faithful, which emphasizes:

1. Participating at Mass is a health risk for any individual. For those who do not attend Mass during this time because of personal vulnerability, 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.

Required Guidelines:

For a parish to resume public 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 should 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 face covering or shield.
6. Priests are required to wear a mask or face shield during Mass in the following scenarios: processing in and out; when a server/deacon is holding the Roman Missal for the priest; during the Eucharistic Prayer unless the communion hosts for the assembly are in a lidded ciborium or covered by a corporal or chalice pall; and while distributing Holy Communion.
7. Deacons should wear face coverings during the entirety of Mass, except when preaching or proclaiming the Gospel.
8. All liturgical ministers such as lectors, servers, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required to wear a face covering or shield if they cannot maintain a 15-foot distance from parishioners and other liturgical ministers in the sanctuary. Lectors can remove face coverings while proclaiming the Word of God.
9. Parishioners over the age of five, who do not have a medical or psychological condition prohibiting mask use are required to use a mask or other face covering. Parishes should have extra face coverings on hand outside parish entrances.

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. When possible, prop open doors so that parishioners do not have to touch surfaces as they enter and exit.
6. Parishes should not use cry rooms, and should encourage parishioners to minimally use bathrooms, or other shared spaces.
7. Parishes should remove pamphlets, CDs, and other items for distribution from gathering space.
8. 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.
9. A plan should be in place to address situations in which:
 - a. A person arrives at Mass who appears to have COVID-19 symptoms
 - b. The parish reaches maximum capacity and others are still arriving for MassIn 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 should not schedule 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 all phases First Communions, baptisms, wedding, and funerals can be celebrated while meeting the above guidelines.