

May 27, 2021

Given the new State of Massachusetts protocols that go into place on May 29, the following more detailed guidance is issued for the parishes of the Diocese of Springfield.

General Guidelines

- **As of May 29, 2021**, vaccinated people are no longer required to wear masks or socially distance in our parishes. Vaccinated parishioners do not have to wear masks and can be seated anywhere in the church. However, for those who might be uncomfortable we recommend wearing your masks anyway. Unvaccinated parishioners are encouraged to wear masks. Parents have the right to determine whether or not their children also need to wear masks.
- Parishes and pastors will not be policing for compliance. Every parishioner and family will be expected to make a sound, reasonable decision about when they are ready to take off their masks and be near other people. No pastor and no parish will be expected to ask people whether or not they have been vaccinated.
- The pastor has a high degree of discretion in the implementation and timing of these changes. Some pastors may make changes more quickly than others. Pastors are encouraged to engage parish leadership in a conversation about how best to make the changes in their respective parishes.
- Since masking and social distancing are still required in public schools in Massachusetts even after May 29, we are not yet certain about what faith formation programs for children will need to look like in the fall. The programs will certainly be allowed and in person, but we do not know yet about masking and distancing requirements. We will keep you advised.
- For those with medical conditions guidelines didn't changed.
- **Dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains for the time being. We are coordinating with the other Massachusetts dioceses a date to end the dispensation.**
- **It is no longer necessary to regularly disinfect surfaces. Some pastors may decide to continue to do so for a time, but it is not required. Great practice is to disinfect once a week after weekend Masses and after bigger celebrations like funerals or marriages**
- **Missalettes and hymnals may be used and kept in the pews.** Parishes may want to engage in significant conversation about whether and how they want to do this.

Regarding the Celebration of the Mass

- All pews and areas of worship can be open with the understanding that those who would like to keep social distance can do that.
- Congregational singing is allowed, as are choirs. Pastors may use their discretion with regard to masks for their choirs.
- Deacons can play their full liturgical roles: reading the gospel, preaching when appropriate, preparing the altar, the elevation of the Chalice, and assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion.
- Altar servers may be used.
 - It should be clearly communicated to parents that children may wear masks while altar serving.
 - It is likely that a re-training of altar servers, both children and adults, will be necessary.
- Liturgical ministers, such as Lectors and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist can be used.
 - A re-training of these volunteers may be necessary.
 - Parishes may wish to use this as an opportunity to reach out to new volunteers to fill these roles.
 - Office of Worship will be providing some dates for trainings
- A collection may be taken up by using a basket, preferably with a pole, since some people may still feel uncomfortable touching a basket that many other people have just touched. Some may feel that they have no option if the basket is handed to them. This reluctance may end up hurting the parish offertory.
- Pastors are encouraged to move slowly in returning to the shaking of hands at the Sign of Peace. Other forms for the Sign of Peace could be used and encouraged.
- Priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist should still disinfect their hands before distributing Holy Communion.
- Priests, deacons, and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist are strongly encouraged to continue to wear masks during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- The bottle of hand sanitizer should be kept close at hand in case someone receives communion on the tongue. Pastors may exercise their discretion in this matter.
- **Communion under both species is still not allowed at this time.** A clear communication will go out to parishes when this practice may resume. The reception of Holy Communion may return to their pre-covid19 methods by people coming to the altar.
- **Holy Water places should remain empty at this time.** Some parishes gave away bottles of Holy Water to the people or purchased touch less dispensers. Both practices are encouraged.

Regarding Pastoral Care

- Communion calls may resume normally, though it may be necessary and wise for there to be a re-training of the ministers of Holy Communion on how to be effective and respectful of people's concerns in this ministry.

- Nursing home visits and Masses may resume, although it remains necessary to be completely respectful of the protocols of the facility being visited, or hosting the Mass.
- Services in funeral homes, conducted by priests, deacons, and pastoral associates may resume, at the discretion of the pastor.
- The use of confessionals may resume.

Regarding other Parish Activities

- Not every parish is going to be able to restart everything at once. A priority should be given to the liturgy, and then to pastoral care, and then to other activities such as faith formation and youth ministry, and finally to parish social activities.
- Food and drink may be served at parish activities.
- Pastors continue to have discretion over the use of the parish facilities by outside groups. Pastors continue to have responsibility to be sure the parish space is being used safely.
- Out of state and international parish service trips should still be treated with an abundance of caution, as every state has their own policies and COVID continues to rage in many parts of the world.

Final Points

- This document is not intended to be comprehensive. There will be many questions that arise, that will be addressed in the coming weeks.
- Our major recommendation is to go slow with all changes that we share our care for parishioners.

Any questions can be directed to Fr Bill Hamilton Director Office of Divine Worship at frb.hamilton@diospringfield.org or Fr. Piotr Calik – Vicar General at p.calik@diospringfield.org