



Guidelines to prepare for Public Mass

DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER
UPDATED MAY 14, 2021



Change Log

Date	Key Changes
05/14/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holy Water fonts may now be filled• Two lectors may now be used for the Liturgy of the Word• Distribution of Holy Communion is to take place at its normal time in the Mass• The requirement for only one instrumentalist and one cantor has been lifted• 50% capacity has been lifted, but social distance requirements remain• Offertory collection guidance changed to allow collections by ushers• References to State and Federal guidance has been updated• Masks do not need to be worn outside. Six-foot social distancing should be retained.• Screening guidelines have been updated to allow for travel within the United States without quarantine
01/21/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidelines for Usage of Masks changed to Instructions for the Usage of Masks and section updated• Updated Screening Guidelines
08/28/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change Log Added• Updated maximum occupancy percentage• Added new section: Guidelines for Usage of Masks• Added new section: Screening Guidelines• Definition of “close contact” added

Introduction

We continue to offer Mass and the Sacraments in the present circumstances; we know that they are our source of union with Our Lord and the Baptized. These updated pages reflect movements forward, requirements and guidelines still to be observed, and our longing to say with the Psalmist: “I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go up to the House of the Lord! And now, our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.’”

The **public safety portions** of these instructions are based on two primary documents:

- The State of New Hampshire’s [Universal Best Practices](#) (as updated April 29, 2021).
- The United States Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”) [Considerations for Communities of Faith](#) (as updated on February 19, 2021)

Pastors and Parish Staff

Pastors and Parish Staff, especially staff members with a special responsibility for implementing these guidelines, should review this document. You will be more able to answer questions or criticisms from the Faithful if you have a context and a little more foundation of understanding.

Not all of them apply directly to the context of worship, but in reviewing the public safety documents, **we can categorize those that are appropriate to our experience:**

1. To Prepare for Mass with a Congregation
2. Instructions for Usage of Masks
3. Screening Guidelines
4. Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic
5. Sanitizing/Disinfecting
6. Mitigation

As you review this information, please consider:

- how staff and volunteers will be able to implement them,
- and how they can and will be trained to do so.

Our Diocesan Offices are prepared and pleased to provide assistance in this, as they have been so readily and thoroughly throughout these many months.

Most importantly, each parish is encouraged to inform (by website, bulletin or social media) parishioners and possible visitors regarding the steps that are being taken to protect the health and safety of all.

Our attention and willingness to follow these steps will bring us closer to the much longed-for full resumption of the public celebration of Mass in our churches. Misteps or ignoring these precautions could be to the detriment of all, so I ask us all to be responsible to and for each other.

1. To Prepare for Mass with a Congregation

Designate a staff person to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns, especially if sickness or contagion may have occurred.

The staff person should be aware of who to contact.

CDC guidelines call for an area to which a person may be brought and separated from others if they become sick during Mass.

NEXT STEPS:

Calculate how many seats will accommodate and respect 6-foot social distancing.

Mark off 6-foot distances side-to-side, forward and back for each seat.

Families are not to be separated, so take into account the arrangement on either side, in front of and behind a family.

Mark off 6-foot lines on aisles for reception of Holy Communion.

Disinfect seating areas, grab areas and all door handles at the end of each day. Where possible, doors should be propped open to allow people to enter and exit without the need to touch the doors.

Disinfect Holy Water Fonts daily and refill them daily. You may suggest to your people that they bring bottled water to be blessed and taken home for continuous home use so that they may have access to this sacramental and bless themselves daily. The Rite for Blessing Holy Water may be used.

THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTION HAS NOT BEEN OBSERVED IN MANY PLACES, AND IT IS TO BE NOTED THE BLESSED SACRAMENT REQUIRES PROPER RESPECT:

Prepare Holy Communion stations with a table, white cloth, corporal, two lighted candles and sanitizing materials for preparation and any/every time contact is made while distributing the Sacred Host. (The white cloth, corporal and two lighted candles have always been customary for the place where the Host will be placed down – in this case, when we are masking and also sanitizing. A genuflection is appropriate when placing down and picking up the Ciborium from this table).

A kneeler ought to be at each station to be available to those who choose to kneel. The kneeler may need to be disinfected as it provides a place for hands to rest.

Engage and thoroughly prepare ushers to guide, direct and assist, but maintain distancing.

Prepare masks for anyone who will be distributing Holy Communion. To ensure distancing and absolute reverence to the Blessed Sacrament, only one other may assist the celebrant in the distribution of Holy Communion.

For Holy Communion, distributors must go to the Communion station, put on a protective mask, sanitize fingers/hands, and distribute Holy Communion, sanitizing as necessary.

After distribution, remove mask, sanitize, and return the Ciborium to the Altar for reposition.

Holy Communion is to be distributed at the proper usual time in the Mass.

Those who are not able to be accommodated because occupancy has been reached should attend Mass from outside or, if there is another place used for overflow at Christmas, for example, they may be directed to the place properly set up to accommodate them. Those already inside the main worship area could, perhaps, be asked to give up their seat if one who is needy has been unable to enter.

Masses should be at the regularly scheduled times and any Mass(es) added should be in addition to those regularly scheduled times.

In cases where it is a pressing need for an extra Mass, but priestly help would be necessary, please contact Jo-Ann Ellison for assistance of priests or Bishop Libasci for availability.

Livestreaming or recording should continue for the time being, especially for those who ought not or must not attend due to illness or contagion issues.

Parishes may either prepare a place(s) where collection envelopes/offerings may be safely deposited without interaction or provide collections by ushers using baskets at the end of pews. If collection using pews is used, ushers should wear masks, and sanitize their hands before and after collection. Passing of a basket should not be used at this time.

In some cases, especially if the parish church(es) is/are small and there is space on the church grounds or a contiguous property, the Mass may be celebrated outside on a portable altar that is properly prepared and all articles are safeguarded from windy conditions. People should be instructed to bring lawn chairs and masks and maintain social distancing throughout. Outdoor Masses may NOT be celebrated on any other parcel of land. The permission for outdoor Mass is solely for church grounds or a contiguous property.

2. Instructions for Usage of Masks

As per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Masks are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.” The wearing of masks in all public gatherings remains the best practice in the eyes of state and federal public health authorities and is required in gatherings in the Diocese of Manchester.

(N.B. Numerous letters have come from those who refuse to wear a mask, and also numerous letters have come from families who arrived at their church and, at the sight of many not wearing masks, have felt the need to return home and not attend Mass. This presents a sad and pressing reality that continues).

Those **readily exempted from wearing a mask**, but still must maintain distancing from non-family members are:

Children younger than five years old

Adults or children who:

- Endure a medical condition
- Have a disability or difficulty putting on or taking off a mask/facial covering without assistance
- Have trouble breathing and would be further impaired by facial covering
- Are deaf or hard of hearing (this also includes anyone accompanying/assisting that person) or anyone accompanying him or her
- Find that the covering of the face is psychologically difficult or traumatizing
- Find that wearing a mask may be difficult due to sensory or behavioral issues

Priests while celebrating Mass may not wear a mask (this is in accordance with directives from the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments).

Priests MUST, however, wear a mask **when distributing Holy Communion**.

Priests then remove the mask until the Dismissal.

Persons proclaiming the Readings or leading the General Intercessions remove the mask.

6-foot social distancing is to be maintained on outdoor areas of church property (including parking lots and walkways). Parishioners who congregate outside the church building before or after Mass should maintain social distance.

3. Screening Guidelines

These Screening Guidelines have been made available and have been posted faithfully by parish staffs and they are also in so many public places that they can become too familiar. We include them here since they remain in force.

- i. Do you have any of the following symptoms of COVID-19:
 1. Fever (a documented temperature of 100.4 degrees F or higher) or feeling feverish
 2. Respiratory symptoms: runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath
 3. General body symptoms: muscle aches, chills and severe fatigue
 4. Gastrointestinal symptoms: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
 5. Changes in your sense of taste or smell
- ii. Have you had close contact with someone in the prior 10 days who has tested positive for COVID-19?* (Note: healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment should answer “no” because they are not considered to have exposure).
- iii. Have you traveled in the prior 10 days internationally (outside of the U.S., except for essential travel to/from Canada) or on a cruise ship?*

*NOTE: Items ii and iii above do NOT apply if either of the following are true:

1. You are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and more than 14 days have passed since you received all required doses of your COVID-19 vaccine.
2. You have previously tested positive for active COVID-19 infection (by PCR or antigen testing) in the last 90 days. If you had a previous infection that was more than 90 days ago, you must still follow all quarantine requirements.

[Click here](#) for the latest version of the New Hampshire Travel and Screening Guidance.

4. Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic

Signs should be posted informing the Faithful of the symptoms of COVID-19 before entering the place of worship. People who would answer “yes” to any of the questions contained in that notice must not enter and should be told to isolate, quarantine and/or be tested for COVID-19.

A priest with a positive test result for COVID-19 or with COVID-19 symptoms, or who has been in close contact with an individual with COVID-19, must not celebrate public Mass at this time. If they have been fully vaccinated, then the “close contact” requirement is lifted.

A priest in a high-risk group may elect to celebrate public Mass, but have another priest or deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion distribute Holy Communion in his place.

5. Sanitizing /Disinfecting

- Hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol should be made available at entrances and exits of the facility and in the sacristy.
- All ministers must sanitize hands before and after the Liturgy.
- All frequently-touched surfaces (including seating areas, electrical switches, door handles, restrooms, objects and utensils) must be cleaned and disinfected at the end of each day following CDC guidelines and the New Hampshire Universal Best Practices. See [Detailed Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Churches in the Diocese of Manchester](#).

6. Mitigation

- Bringing up the gifts in an Offertory Procession is suspended.
- The Sign of Peace is suspended.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood is suspended.
- Two Lectors may be assigned for the Readings.
- Altar Servers are not limited in number but only may assist at Mass, following the precautions of face covering, sanitizing, distancing in procession and in seating.
- Hymnals, missalettes and other books are to remain absent from the pews or vestibule tables.
- Parishioners may use their own missals, prayerbooks, Magnificat, etc., brought from home and kept in their possession at all times.

Regarding Music at Mass for the time being:

- For the time being, there should be appropriate but limited congregational singing.
- Due to special requirements and capacity limits, cantors, musicians, and small choral groups could lend music to the Mass, observing the 20-foot distance from others and each other.
- In the event that fully typical congregational singing resumes before the return of hymnals and missalettes, music ministers should be considering Acclamations and Dialogues (The Lord be with you/ And with your spirit). All music ministers and Liturgy planners must become familiar with and follow more closely the instructions found in the GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE LITURGY regarding music.
- Psalms and refrains are usually sung after the First Reading, but the GIRM encourages the use of Psalms and refrains for the Entrance Procession and Communion Processions as well. This allows the assembly to participate by singing and, with the eyes focused ahead, follow in union with the procession to the Sanctuary and, again, the reverent procession to reception of Holy Communion.

