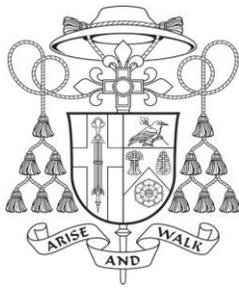




# Preparing for Mass with a Congregation

DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER





OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

June 2, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As you know and, in fact have experienced in some ways, we continue to navigate these unfamiliar waters that are called a pandemic. In purposeful and prudent movements forward, we have been meeting daily and for long periods during these many weeks preparing the way to bring the Lord's flock back into safe and green pastures. Now, based on public health guidance from federal, state and local resources, I announced on May 29, 2020 that the preparations we have been making have resulted in our beginning to resume the "Celebration of Mass With a Congregation" (*the correct phrase as printed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal*). The information that follows implements advice and requirements from public health authorities and, most importantly respects what we require for the proper and dignified celebration of our Roman Catholic Holy Mass. In a spirit of the virtue of true charity, and in order to best protect the health and well-being of all of our brothers and sisters, the information that follows is to be utilized in all Diocese of Manchester locations.

Our coming together in church for Mass, baptisms, weddings, funerals and other liturgical worship as a community will undoubtedly seem a little different in the days ahead. In fact, a noticeable difference that is already quite striking is the deep reverence and attention of all as they are receiving Holy Communion! May THIS difference remain among us always!

I ask that you keep in mind, then, that the measures we are implementing at this time do not lessen or damage our liturgical celebrations. In fact, certain attention will remind us that this is GOD'S House. His House deserves the very best of attention to cleanliness, awareness and respect. Not only that, but for several weeks our priests have been engaged in a study of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal to reacquaint themselves with the actual rubrics and directives of the Universal and local Church in the United States. This has been a time of "active waiting" for the long desired "full, conscious and active participation" of which the Second Vatican Council spoke in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. May the fruit of all who have labored and all who have prayed for us and patiently remained faithful be crowned with God's grace and our gratitude.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci  
Bishop of Manchester

## Introduction

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

- The State of New Hampshire's May 29, 2020 Stay at Home 2.0 Order on Houses of Worship
- The State of New Hampshire's Stay at Home 2.0 Universal Guidelines
- The United States Centers for Disease Control ("CDC") May 22, 2020 Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith

## Pastors and Parish Staff

*(especially staff members with a special responsibility for implementing these guidelines)* **should review these documents.** 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:

### **To Prepare for Mass With a Congregation Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic Sanitizing/Disinfecting 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. Further information on trainings will also be forthcoming.

Most importantly, each parish is encouraged to inform, by website or social media, parishioners and possible visitors, 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 full resumption of the public celebration of Mass without mitigation measures. Missteps or ignoring these precautions could be to the detriment of all, so I ask us all to be responsible to and for each other.

## **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 whom 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.

Calculate how many seats will accommodate and respect 40% maximum occupancy.

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. Doors should be propped open to allow people to enter and exit without the need to touch the doors.

Disinfect Holy Water Fonts and keep them empty.

Remove all hymnals and Missalettes. Congregation should be instructed NOT to sing due to the increased possibility of contamination.

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. A kneeler must 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 so as not to forget the situation of contagion.

Prepare a place(s) where collection envelopes/offering may be safely deposited without interaction.

Prepare masks for whomever will distribute Holy Communion, and be sure they are only at a station as described above.

Only one other may assist the celebrant in the distribution of Holy Communion to ensure cleanliness and absolute reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. With a forty percent occupancy, only two distributors should easily suffice in any church under these circumstances as well.

The exchanging of the Sign of Peace continues to be omitted.

Of course, there continues to be no distribution of the Precious Blood.

Holy Communion may be distributed at the usual time with distributors to go to the Communion station, put on a protective mask, sanitize fingers/hands, distribute Holy Communion, and sanitize as necessary. After distribution remove mask, sanitize and return the Ciborium to the altar for reposition.

For the sake of those praying the Mass through other means, distributors of Holy Communion should remain after Mass to allow the later arrivals to receive.

Conversely, Holy Communion may, instead, be distributed only after the Dismissal, following the same precautionary procedures as above and in the manner followed for the arriving communicants.

Pastors must make the choice that best suits their particular parish limitations or circumstance.

All should be instructed to put the kneeler DOWN before they leave so as to indicate a specific area to be disinfected to eliminate unnecessary work, though many times people use the length of the pew's back support to steady themselves as they enter and leave their own pew. They may also grab pew ends to steady themselves in genuflecting.

Those who are not able to be accommodated because 40% occupancy has been reached should be able to 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.

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

In cases where it is a more pressing need for an extra Mass, please contact Jo-Ann Ellison for assistance of priests or Bishop Libasci for availability.

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.

Daily Mass with a Congregation may begin immediately, with all precautions being observed.

## Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic

- o Signs should be posted informing the Faithful of the symptoms of COVID-19 before entering the place of worship. People with any of the risk factors contained in that notice should be told to quarantine and not attend Mass. A person with any of the following symptoms must not enter:
  - a) A person who has any of the following symptoms of COVID-19:
    - i. Fever (feeling feverish or a documented temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher);
    - ii. Respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, or shortness of breath (other than seasonal allergy symptoms);
    - iii. Whole body symptoms such as muscle aches, chills, and severe fatigue;
    - iv. Changes in the person's sense of taste or smell;
  - b) A person who has been in close contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the past 14 days (Note: healthcare workers caring for COVID-19 patients while wearing appropriate personal protective equipment can attend); or
  - c) A person who has travelled in the past 14 days either:
    - i. Internationally (outside the United States)
    - ii. By cruise ship; or
    - iii. Domestically (within the United States) outside of New Hampshire, Vermont, or Maine on public transportation (bus, train, plane, etc)

A priest with a positive test result for COVID-19 or with a respiratory infection of any kind, or who has been in direct contact with an individual with COVID-19 must not celebrate public Mass at this time. 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.

## 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 Liturgy following CDC guidelines and the New Hampshire Universal Guidelines;
- People should be asked to put their kneelers down before they leave church to indicate previously occupied areas that should be sanitized.

## Mitigation

- Charity begins at home and in order to protect other people at church, masks really must be worn by all except children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing, anyone incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face-covering without assistance. Priests are directed by the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship never to wear a face covering during the celebration of the Mass. It is to be put on only for distribution of Holy Communion and then removed immediately.
- Bringing up the gifts in an Offertory Procession is suspended
- The Sign of Peace is suspended
- Distribution of the Precious Blood is suspended
- Only one Lector is to be assigned for the Readings
- Altar Servers should not be ministering at this time (if circumstances warrant it approval must be sought from the Office of Worship)
- Hymnals, Missalettes and other books are to be removed 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.
- For the immediate future congregational singing should be omitted, or at least limited.
- One instrumentalist and one cantor at least 20 feet away from others and each other may lend music to the Mass.
- Acclamations, Dialogues (The Lord be with you/ And with your spirit), Psalm refrains etc. should be prepared for future use of singing without hymnals and Missalettes.

