

## DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER MEMORANDUM

To: Pastors with Cemeteries, Directors of Cemeteries, and Business Managers of Cemeteries  
From: David Gabert, Director of Cemetery Operations  
Date: June 4, 2020  
RE: Update 5 on Coronavirus – Bishop’s Documents (Preparing for a Mass with a Congregation) and Other Protective Measures Pertaining to Catholic Funeral Rites and Catholic Cemeteries.

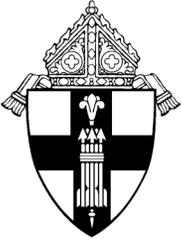
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As you know, based on the most recent guidance from state and federal public health experts, including the State’s May 28 Stay at Home 2.0 document pertaining to houses of worship, Bishop Libasci has published new guidance for the resumption of public Masses entitled “*Preparing for a Mass with a Congregation*” (to be referred to as the Bishop’s Documents). All of this will have an impact on Catholic Funeral Rites and Catholic cemeteries.

As of June 6, 2020, religious services can be offered indoors such as in a Church, mausoleum, cemetery chapel, and other cemetery gathering spaces as long as the entity complies with all of the procedures outlined in the Bishop’s Documents. The principles include: How to prepare for Mass with a Congregation; Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic; Sanitizing/Disinfecting, and; Mitigation. These principles apply to all Funeral Masses and are also applicable as relevant to the other parts of the Catholic Funeral Rite (namely, the Vigil/wake and Rite of Committal) and any other indoor and outdoor religious services held on cemetery grounds. I ask that you review the Bishop’s Documents with all cemetery workers (including independent contractors).

As noted in the Bishop’s Documents, an entity offering religious services indoors can admit no more than 40% of the number allowed under its occupancy permit. However, outdoor religious services (i.e, committals/burials) are not covered by this restriction. The only limit on the number of attendees at outdoor committal services is the space needed to maintain the required 6 foot social distancing between people who are not members of the same immediate household.

Each location is to have a staff member monitor compliance with protective measures such as hygiene and social distancing, even for outdoor services. Note that there are special provisions in the Bishop’s Documents for outdoor Masses, and these apply if an outdoor Mass is being celebrated in a cemetery.



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### PREVENTIVE MEASURES FOR CLERGY AND CEMETERY STAFF

In addition to complying with the principles provided in the Bishop's Documents pertaining to Masses and indoor religious services, please find the following protective measures that are specific to the other parts of the Catholic Funeral Rite (Vigils/wakes and the Rite of Committal) and other cemetery activities. Please note that the following protective measures listed below *do not* include all of the necessary steps for conducting indoor religious services as found in the Bishop's Documents, so you should review those documents in their entirety and carry out all applicable provisions.

#### To Prepare for a Vigil (Wake) or Committal Service:

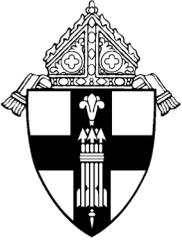
1. Cemetery staff and clergy should continue to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), which includes disposable gloves and masks/face coverings (that cover nose and mouth) prior to greeting individuals and/or touching or moving the casket/coffin;
2. Chairs and other outside items used at committal services should be wiped down and sanitized after every service, especially high-touch areas outdoors (see EPA link below for a list of effective disinfectants);
3. Hand sanitizers should be provided at entrances and exits of facilities as well as in well-trafficked areas (such as cafeterias, bathrooms and etc.). A cemetery can purchase hand sanitizers by the gallon from the Diocese. Please contact Deb Keane at 663-0155 to put in an order;
4. Prior to arrival at a committal service (indoor or outdoor) people should be instructed to bring their own masks/face coverings and maintain social distancing (i.e, 6 feet between people who are not members of the same immediate household) throughout the service, and;
5. Assign a staff person to assist in compliance with protective policies such as hygiene and social distancing, even for outdoor services.

#### Instructions to the Sick/Symptomatic:

6. Encourage cemetery staff to stay home when sick, and send home those who report feeling ill or display symptoms. Please read the Sick/Symptomatic section in the Bishop's Documents for a more descriptive list of symptoms.

#### Sanitizing/Disinfecting:

7. When the casket/coffin arrives at the cemetery, there should be a designated staff member, with a face covering (defined below) and disposable gloves, to disinfect the exterior of the casket/coffin while giving priority to the handles and sides that can come in contact with employees;
8. Cemetery staff and other individuals (funeral home staff) may assist with removing the casket/coffin after it has been sanitized, and if they are wearing a mask/face covering and protective gloves;
9. Continue disinfecting surfaces, packages and boxes, credit cards, pens, the interior of vehicles, equipment, tools, and etc. (see EPA link below for a list of effective disinfectants), and;
10. Continue to wash hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds or two Hail Mary's), especially after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing (into the arm), going to the bathroom, before eating or preparing food, and prior to handling mail and packages.



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### **Mitigation:**

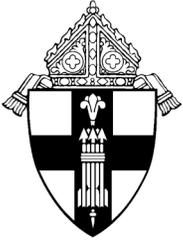
11. At the vigil/wake or committal service (indoor or outdoor), clergy should avoid touching the body or casket/coffin. If they have to touch the casket/coffin, they should wear disposable gloves and insist that the casket/coffin is sanitized;
12. At the vigil/wake or committal service (indoors or outdoors), clergy should avoid physical contact and keep the mask/face covering on at all times except when offering the prayers. When offering the prayers without a mask/face covering, clergy should stay between 12 and 15 feet away (if possible) from the nearest person;
13. Cemetery staff should avoid contact with the families and funeral home employees and lower the casket/coffin after families have left the cemetery;
14. Post signs asking all those who enter the cemetery grounds not to engage cemetery staff and keep 6 feet apart from each other;
15. Prohibit cemetery staff from riding in vehicles together – including cemetery trucks and other vehicles;
16. Discourage cemetery staff from using other staff member's phones, desks, offices, and other work tools and equipment;
17. Ensure proper disposal of all protective equipment by carefully removing and placing them in plastic trash bags, and;
18. Remind staff to avoid touching their own face, mouths, nose, and eyes because it is also possible to contract the virus via a surface or object with the virus on it.

### **All Other:**

19. Keep funeral homes, families, and cemetery staff informed of these protective measures – post friendly “reminder” signs in conspicuous locations;
20. Continue to limit public access to cemetery offices and other indoor facilities (unless in compliance with the Bishop's orders to conduct religious services), and;
21. Limit lot sale presentations to “at need only” while keeping a six-foot distance and encourage on-line or phone arrangements.

### **Supporting Websites:**

22. Check the Diocesan website at <https://www.catholicnh.org/> and the dedicated diocesan cemetery website at <https://www.catholicnh.org/parishes/parish-life/catholic-cemeteries/coronavirus-cemeteries> for previous and on-going updates on the Coronavirus;
23. Check the EPA database at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2> for disinfectants proven effective against the Coronavirus;



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24. If you cannot get the proper disposable masks, the CDC recommends using multiple layers of cloth for face coverings as long as they cover the nose and mouth, they are secured with ties or ear loops, that the outside of the material is not touched while in use, and the coverings are washed daily. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website via the following link for the instructions on how to make the proper face covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>, and;
25. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) site via the following link <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#funerals>. This site offers valuable information and is updated regularly.

Please know that we are indebted to you for carrying out one of the Church's most essential ministries - to provide a sacred resting place for the faithful who await the Resurrection. It's important that we continue to remember that we are a community of faith, and together we will get through these most unusual times. Let us continue to pray for all those affected by this virus.

As always, don't hesitate to call or e-mail me with any questions or concerns at (603) 663-0191, or by email at [dgabert@rcbm.org](mailto:dgabert@rcbm.org).