



MEMORANDUM

TO: CLERGY, RELIGIOUS, COMMUNICATION COORDINATORS & PASTORAL CENTER STAFF

FROM: BISHOP MYRON J. COTTA

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2021

RE: UPDATE ON INDOOR MASSES

Brothers and Sisters,

We give thanks for the recent Supreme Court ruling recognizing that the prohibition of indoor worship is a violation of our religious liberty. At the same time, we do not in any way wish to downplay the seriousness of the pandemic. We will be returning indoor services, not only because of this ruling but also because we know that it can be done safely. There have been thousands if not millions of safe celebrations of the Mass throughout the country over the past months since indoor Masses have resumed. We are still not aware of a single outbreak occurring at a Catholic Mass where safety protocols were being strictly followed, even when an asymptomatic individual was present who later tested positive for COVID-19.

For that safety record to continue, it is absolutely vital that all of us continue to follow the safeguards attached to this document, so that we can show that our worship is safe, even indoors. The maximum capacity for indoor Masses is now 25% (still with physical distancing), without the hard limit of 100. I ask priests, where practical, to continue to provide an outdoor Mass, in order to accommodate greater numbers, allow for singing, and provide for those who still may not feel comfortable worshipping inside. In addition, I am also encouraging parishes to continue livestreamed Masses to accommodate the vulnerable who cannot attend public Mass.

Parishes may begin indoor Masses this weekend if they are prepared to do so.

As Bishop, I commend the Faithful, Clergy, Parish staffs and Parish volunteers for their patience and understanding through the numerous transitions since the pandemic began and I ask of you again for that same cooperation.

The Pastoral Center Staff and myself look forward to working *As One* with parishes as they anticipate celebrating indoor Masses once again. If there are any questions regarding the reopening of indoor Masses, please contact **Michael Schmitz, Director of Liturgy Worship** or **Chandler Marquez, Director of Communications** by contacting the Pastoral Center at (209) 466-0636.

Let us continue to pray for a swift end to the pandemic.

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Myron J. Cotta



Returning to Indoor Masses

As we return to indoor Masses, parishes must continue to follow the directives given in this document. They are to be followed strictly until further notice. Once again, your patience, understanding, and cooperation are deeply appreciated.

General Principles

1. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days will continue.
2. If people choose to attend Mass, they must know that they do so at their own risk. During this phase, we ask that those at-risk of serious illness from COVID-19 or Flu remain home. Parishes should arrange to bring Communion to those who wish it, following the proper precautions.
3. Anyone with slightest symptoms of the illness, including clergy, must not attend Mass.
4. Livestream Masses are to be continued and outdoor setting for Mass should still be an option, weather permitted. Reminder: you can serve a greater number of attendance outdoors.
5. Physical distancing of at least 6ft between people of different households will be observed.
6. If confessions are to be offered in preparation for resuming public Masses the existing guidelines should be followed.

Scheduling of Masses

1. Attendance inside church buildings is limited according to each county's tier status in the state plan. Parishes are to have a sign-up system in place, or another way to organize attendance. This will also help with contact tracing if there should unfortunately be an outbreak related to a service.

2. Parishes could consider scheduling for people to attend daily Masses if there is too much demand on Saturday evenings/Sundays. This is merely a pastoral accommodation for the moment.
3. The faithful should sign up for Mass at only one parish.

Preparation of the Church Building

1. Seating should be planned in accordance with physical distancing measures. Those of the same household may sit together, otherwise, people should be spaced at least six feet apart. See the space-planning guide from the Archdiocese of Chicago-
<https://www.archchicago.org/documents/70111/2833001/Physical+Space+Planning+Guide.pdf/09da3ef4-8c63-4c41-8a11-f4def3253549>
2. Cry rooms/confessionals/reconciliation rooms should not be used.
3. Hand sanitizer will be available near all entrances.
4. Holy water stoups will be empty (holy water may be made available from a closed container), hymnals/missalettes will be removed from pews.
5. The distancing policy is to be posted on/nearby the doors, in accord with county/city guidelines. It should be clear which doors are to be used as entrances/exits.
6. Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.¹ The church should be disinfected between services.
7. A team of ushers must be formed and properly trained, who can attend the doors, welcome, instruct, and guide the people as they arrive for Mass. These should be made up of people who are not in at-risk groups for COVID-19.

Directives for Celebration of Mass

1. With strict limitations on gatherings, and in the interest of avoiding possible outbreaks of COVID-19, the celebration of Mass should be simplified according to the options given in the Missal.
2. The general liturgical guidelines remain in force.

¹ While the CDC recently stated that touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touching one's own mouth, nose, or eyes is not the *main* way the virus spreads, it is still a possible route of transmission.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

- a. Communion from the chalice is suspended.
 - b. The exchange of the sign of peace is omitted.
3. Where possible, Mass may be celebrated outdoors or in other parish buildings.
4. The faithful should be asked to self-screen for symptoms before attending Mass.
 - a. See the list at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>
5. Those present should wear a mask which covers the nose and mouth. Children under 2 and those with breathing problems, or those not able to remove the mask themselves, should not wear one. Parishes should consider supplying masks for those who do not have one.
6. To allow as many people to attend Mass as possible, the number of ministers should be reduced. Consider not having altar servers, or having only one, if necessary. As ordained ministers, it is appropriate that Deacons serve if they are available and willing. Similarly, the priest or deacon could proclaim all the readings.
7. Due to the increased risk of spreading the disease through respiratory droplets and aerosols well beyond 6ft when singing, there should not be singing at an indoor Mass with a congregation during this phase. Singing may continue to be provided for outdoor liturgies, livestreamed liturgies, but those singing (or playing wind instruments) must be separated from others. Instrumental music can and should be used at Masses to provide solemnity.
8. The minister(s) should enter from and depart directly to the sacristy; the offertory procession should be omitted. The collection should be facilitated by a stationary container.
9. Consider all practices which could be legitimately altered to avoid spreading disease. For example, hosts for the Communion of the faithful could be placed in covered ciboria on another corporal at the edge of the altar. The cover should be handled in the same way as the pall on the chalice.

Holy Communion

10. Holy Communion should be distributed at the customary point in the Mass.

11. Ministers put on a face covering and sanitize hands for the distribution of Communion. A small table should be placed near the communion minister, with room for a corporal and hand sanitizer.
12. Communion in the hand is strongly recommended. Consider using larger (1½” diameter) hosts for Communion. When approaching for Communion, the faithful should pull their mask down, and replace it after receiving. Whenever ministers make physical contact with a communicant, they must sanitize their hands. No one is to be denied receiving Holy Communion on the tongue.
13. The floor should be marked so that physical distancing can be followed during the Communion procession.
14. If a priest is in at-risk group of serious illness from COVID-19, he may refrain from the distribution of Communion and have the Deacon and/or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion distribute in his stead.
15. Especially for larger parishes where the capacity for mass attendance is limited, consideration should be given to having times for the simple distribution of Communion, where those who have participated spiritually in a broadcasted Mass might be able to receive Communion, in accord with the above guidelines.

Other Sacraments / Sacramentals

16. Other sacraments/sacramentals may be celebrated in accord with the above principles and guidelines.