



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

COURAGEOUSLY *Living the Gospel*

Guidance for Parishes Regarding COVID-19 — Effective May 22, 2021

General Considerations

As the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days is lifted as of Pentecost 2021, the following considerations may help parishes adapt to new circumstances.

- Parishes should decide about adaptations based on local considerations and the pastoral needs of parishioners. What is right for one parish may not work in another parish.
- It will be helpful for priests to explain adaptations of the guidelines and why they are appropriate. Instructions might highlight hopeful signs such as the increased number of persons vaccinated, and the general loosening of restrictions tied to local circumstances regarding COVID-19.
- Adaptations should also be explained in the context of the importance of Catholics attending Mass and diocesan-wide efforts to joyfully welcome the faithful home after an unprecedented period of restricted in-person worship.
- As parishes seek to continually adapt for the safety of our parishioners, we also urge individuals and families to take personal responsibility to protect themselves and to make appropriate decisions that best meet their needs.

The Celebration of Mass

- Wearing masks helps people feel comfortable about returning to Mass. Therefore, parishes are encouraged to comply with the local government's guidance on face coverings. Since the use of face coverings is encouraged to prevent community spread of COVID-19 (per [CDC Guidelines](#)), parishioners should wear either a mask or a face shield when entering and exiting the church and when processing to and from Communion.
- Parishes are encouraged to continue streaming of at least one weekend Mass.

- Mass schedules may need to be adapted to correspond to the number of persons attending. It may still be necessary to offer additional Masses during this transition as more of the faithful return to Mass.
- Parishes may reduce distancing to three feet between those of different households. Alternatively, parishes may want to designate areas where people feel comfortable with less distancing and areas where the six-foot separation is maintained.
- If they have not already done so, deacons, readers, servers, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should resume their duties. Servers may not necessarily perform all of their prior responsibilities. Still, parishes are strongly encouraged to allow servers to assist at weekend Masses.
- With the necessary prudence, cantors and choirs may resume and lead congregational singing.
- Weekday Masses may need to continue in the main church rather than in a daily Mass chapel.
- Hospitality ministers and ushers should avoid physical contact when greeting parishioners and distributing bulletins. Use of online bulletins and other electronic communications tools should be encouraged for those with the capability to utilize them.
- Handwashing and sanitizing practices should remain in place.
- The offertory procession may return.
- Parishes should continue to carry out the offertory collection in the manner they have presently adopted, although alternative means of giving should also be made available.
- It may not be the time for the sign of peace to resume, particularly since this is optional even under ordinary circumstances.
- Distributing the Precious Blood to the faithful should not return at this time.

General Guidelines Related to the Church Building

- It has been demonstrated that COVID-19 is a primarily an airborne disease. Thus,

while attention to sanitizing worship spaces between Masses remains important, parishes should focus on those areas with the highest rate of traffic rather than attempting a full cleaning of all surfaces after each Mass.

- Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances and in or near the sanctuary where celebrants, extraordinary ministers, and others serving at the Mass can easily use it.
- Depending on circumstances, parishes may refill holy water fonts and baptismal fonts. Additional attention may need to be paid to refresh these receptacles with pure water regularly.
- Parishes may place hymnals and missalettes in the pews. However, according to parish circumstances, it may still be advisable to offer printed worship aids for single use, which are then disposed of after each Mass. Electronic projection of hymns and responses may also be used, if the parish is equipped to do so.

Sacramental Life

- Weddings and funerals may follow similar guidelines as Sunday Mass. It is permissible for the bride and groom to receive Communion under both species, provided they receive from a different chalice than the presider.
- Baptisms should also continue. Priests and deacons should use clean water for each baptism.
- Parishes should hold regular confession. If confessionals have insufficient space or ventilation, another location within the church may be used, respecting privacy and necessary health precautions.
- Anointing of the sick should be done with the utmost care upon request (NB: Use of cotton balls for the application of the Holy Oil and other precautions adopted during the pandemic may still be necessary). Visits to the homebound for Communion may likewise proceed with prudent precautions. If permitted, parishes should visit parishioners in hospitals and nursing homes. The Office of Worship has a bilingual *Comprehensive Guide for Communion to the Sick During the Pandemic* available online at <https://www.dosp.org/liturgy-sacraments-updates/>.