



## DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

### Q&A ON GUIDELINES FOR BEGINNING THE PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF MASSES MAY 21, 2020

***Q: If a particular parish/Pastor does not feel ready to begin the public celebration of Mass on May 31, can that parish begin public Masses at a later date?***

A: Yes, the parish should only begin the public celebration of Mass when it has the proper supplies needed, has enough trained non-vulnerable volunteers to cover the responsibilities needed, and has a system in place to ensure only 25% of occupancy in attendance. If a Pastor does not feel comfortable that he can safely resume public Masses, we would encourage him to postpone the date until the parish is better prepared.

***Q: What is the latest start date that a parish may resume weekend Masses?***

A: The Diocese has not selected a date by which we anticipate all of our parishes to have resumed Sunday Masses. We are aware that some parishes will need extra time and only the Pastor will know when he is sure that all guidelines can be performed safely.

***Q: Can we begin to celebrate Mass with the anticipation for Sunday on Saturday, May 30?***

A: Yes, the anticipation of Mass is part of the weekend liturgies so you may celebrate the Saturday evening Mass with the public participation according to the guidelines on May 29 and on future weekends.

***Q: Can a priest celebrate one Mass on Saturday evening and up to three Masses on Sunday?***

A: Yes, a priest may celebrate the anticipated Mass on Saturday evening and up to three Masses on Sunday. If a priest has previously been given approval to celebrate more Masses due to his assignment of parishes, he can resume his normal Mass schedule. Priests not given permission previously may not add additional Masses nor celebrate more than the four Masses outlined.

***Q: Can we increase attendance for weddings and funerals at the Masses?***

A: Yes, you may celebrate Funeral Masses and Wedding Masses following the guidelines of 25% of occupancy with proper social distancing.

***Q: Can we host funeral lunches, wedding receptions, or other events in our parish hall?***

A: No, not at this time.

***Q: When can we resume public Masses on weekdays?***

A: Weekday Masses will remain private at this time. Bishop Callahan is asking for a gradual opening to bring churches back to full participation. We began the process with Sunday Masses to allow parishes to see how things are working and what adjustments would need to be made. In addition, many parishes are still working to secure the needed supplies and so would not have enough supplies to handle additional weekday Masses at this time.

***Q: Can we schedule First Communion for our parish?***

A: Yes, First Communion Masses should begin to be scheduled. This can be done by either assigning a selected weekend Mass(es) making sure to accommodate 25% of occupancy and maintaining social distancing or by inviting one candidate and family to attend one of the weekday private Masses. Scheduling a group of First Communicants may require assigning a select number of candidates over several Mass times or even several weekends. If selecting a Sunday Mass, be sure to take into consideration all of the details that would need adjustment, such as potential entrance processions, seating, distancing while receiving Communion, etc.

***Q: When counting those that may attend Mass in order to maintain 25% occupancy, does a family count as "1" since they would be from the same household?***

A: No, each person attending should be counted. Families should be seated together in one pew and would not need to maintain the 6-foot social distancing rule while in the pew.

***Q: We only have one Mass each weekend at our parish: can we divide our parishioners to alternating weekends?***

A: Yes, whatever system works in order to maintain 25% occupancy at any given Mass should be utilized.

***Q: Are we required to keep the sign-up/reservation lists and, if so, for how long?***

A: You are not required to keep the lists after a Mass is over and are not being asked to share the lists with anyone outside of the volunteer or the compliance manager who would be checking people in. These lists are simply used in order to allow for the most people to be able to attend Mass on a given weekend. Having a reservation system will assist parishes to avoid having to turn people away at the door because they will know ahead of time how many people will be attending.

It also will provide comfort to many individuals knowing that attendance is being kept to 25% occupancy and

that the parish is adhering to that guideline. In addition, a reservation system will help in scheduling the number of volunteers that will be needed.

If someone were to attend a Mass and is diagnosed with having COVID 19, the parish may be contacted by the health department. No directives have been given that parishes would be required to provide information for contact tracing. If information is discarded after each Mass, a parish could instead contact the parishioners notifying them that a case was identified. We do not want our parishioners to have a false sense of security from us that we will be doing contact tracing; if any tracing would be done, it would be done only via local health departments.

***Q: If the sign-up/reservation system shows that we could be over occupancy rate, can we use an adjoining parish center or room or the parking lot?***

A: No, Bishop Callahan is requiring all in attendance to be seated in the church. The coordination for one location to begin Masses is complex, and additional volunteers would be necessary to organize and clean multiple locations. Please continue to live stream the Masses for those that still need to join from home or who decide that they are not ready to return at this time.

***Q: How should seating be accomplished once individuals enter the church?***

A: Every parish is going to be slightly different according to the layout of the church. It is recommended that an usher be available and assist with seating either from the front of the nave to the back or vice versa. Seating should decrease the amount of people moving and avoiding contact with others as much as possible. The same would be true in dismissing the congregation after Mass so that distancing is maintained and congregating in areas is avoided.

***Q: Since some members of the congregation may choose to not receive Communion, how should the movement of people be handled?***

A: All members of the congregation should be instructed prior to Communion that in order to implement the safest pattern, everyone seated in the pew should come forward. If those coming forward choose not to receive Communion, they can simply signal by crossing their arms or pass by when they approach the priest or deacon.

***Q: Are masks required for everyone attending Mass?***

A: Although we strongly encourage everyone to wear a mask, it is not mandatory. Experts are stating that COVID 19 is highly contagious and can be spread through talking or just breathing. Droplets can be transmitted within three to six feet, but some can be pushed farther out by a cough, sneezing or singing. By having those in attendance wear a mask it will provide some protection to those around them.

***Q: Can a parish limit the number of servers or allow them to wear street clothes??***

A: Yes, to help maintain social distancing in the sanctuary, it is recommended to limit servers, readers and possibly even have the cantor participate from the choir area. So that albs and other liturgical vesture need not be cleaned after each Mass, if approved by the pastor, servers may wear other appropriate street clothing.

***Q: Can the congregation sing at Mass?***

A: Singing has the potential to propel possible contagions beyond a 6-foot distance. Accordingly, as outlined in the guidelines, a cantor and accompanist are allowed, but choirs should not be used. If the pastor is comfortable having those in attendance sing with the cantor, they may permit singing but this is a decision made by the pastor. Instrumental music or even reciting the proper antiphons at the entrance and communion may be things to consider.

***Q: If a parish is having a difficult time finding enough younger volunteers but it does have some individuals who are in the vulnerable category and are willing to assist, can they use them?***

A: If you are having difficulties identifying enough non-vulnerable volunteers but do have some volunteers in the risk category, contact Fr. Dhein at the Chancellor's Office and he will consider the situation on a case by case basis.

***Q: When can we let our parishioners know the date we will resume public Mass?***

A: Each parish must complete and return the certification for readiness form, initialed on the smaller lines and signed by the Pastor, affirming that all of the criteria for reopening are being met. The form should be sent to the Bishop's Office; it may be submitted via mail, e-mail at [dbrannon@diolc.org](mailto:dbrannon@diolc.org), or fax 608-788-4689. When Bishop receives the certification form, he will return to the parish a confirmation form that will grant the parish the approval to resume the weekend public Masses. Only after you receive the confirmation form are you granted the permission to begin.