



Guidelines for the Reopening of Parishes for Sacramental Worship The Progressive Catholic Church

Phase I: Public Masses with strict limits on public gatherings and strict physical distancing

*Adopted in part from the
Working Group on Infectious Disease Protocols for Sacraments and Pastoral Care, (April 28, 2020)
and in consultation with the latest information from the CDC (April 22, 2020)*

The following has been approved by the Progressive Catholic Church Council of Servants and shall be implemented according to local health directives:

I. Preamble

The novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused a severe threat to one's health. In response, federal and local governments have implemented strategies to help mitigate the spread of the contagion including stay-at-home orders, the limitations on the number of persons permitted to gather in one place, the closure of non-essential businesses, as well as calling for social distancing.

Recognizing the importance of Sacramental Worship for the spiritual well-being of our parishioners, the Progressive Catholic Church deems access to the sacraments as essential for the soul, particularly during this difficult time. The guidelines provided hereafter will assist in identifying what types of pastoral care, including the celebration of public liturgies can be offered in a relatively safe matter as stay-at-home mandates begin to be relaxed.

The Progressive Catholic Church's Council of Servants authorizes the following protocol as a safeguard to reduce the risk of contamination, using proper protocol authorized by health officials. It is possible to provide the sacraments to the faithful in a safe way during this phase.

II. CDC Observation and Discovery

According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control) "the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)."

"Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food."

"It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. In general, because of poor survivability of these coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging."

III. Attendance

During this initial phase of the re-opening process, strict limits on public gatherings will be in place. Churches will only be permitted to operate at 25% of their total capacity, or up to 10 persons including the priest and assisting ministers.

In larger venues, this number MAY be increased but only with expressed permission of the local ordinary and in consultation with local health agencies where strict social distancing of six (6) feet or more is observed.

Attendance should be decided on a first-come first-served basis.

“Drive-in” or outdoor Masses are possible where the Mass can be celebrated in a location visible to the faithful who remain in their cars. For example, a Mass could be reasonably celebrated on the front steps of a church, or in a church parking lot. According to the CDC, such events do not comprise a gathering of more than 10 persons, so long as the attendees remain in their cars.

IV. Guidelines for Attendees

The faithful are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass.

Those who are at higher risk from COVID-19, particularly the aged or those with underlying health conditions are encouraged to stay home.

Persons occupying the venue will be required to remain a minimum of six feet apart while entering, exiting, and occupying the venue, and all persons will be required to wear face coverings (unless where exempt due to a medical necessity).

Frequent hand-hygiene is recommended.

Persons who experience symptoms such as a cough, fever, fatigue, and difficulty breathing should stay home, and anyone who has been in close contact with a COVID patient should self-quarantine for fourteen (14) days.

Because Physical distancing only calls for avoiding contact with those outside their own household, families of the same household may elect to sit together.

Because a momentary interaction presents an acceptable risk, especially where other precautions are taken, the six-foot regulation need not be observed between the priest and communicant during the reception of communion but should remain between the other communicants.

V. Guidelines for Clergy

Any priest or other ministers with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid participating in public Masses or administering sacraments during this phase.

A priest or deacon may visit the homebound to distribute the Eucharist, so long as the minister uses the proper protective equipment (PPE).

A priest or deacon may NOT visit a nursing facility where there is a large number of aged individuals or those with underlying health conditions during this phase except to offer the Anointing of the Sick in circumstances where danger of death is imminent.

A priest or deacon may visit a hospital in situations where extreme precautions may be taken to protect the patient as well as the minister to offer the Anointing of the Sick in circumstances where danger of death is imminent.

VI. Guidelines for Facilities

Hand Sanitizer should be placed near the entrances to the church.

Those entering and exiting should use the sanitizer to execute proper and frequent hand hygiene.

The church staff will be responsible to frequently clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in the church.

Tape or ropes should be used to block sections of seating in the church, in order to allow a safe distance of six (6) feet between parishioners to be observed. As mentioned previously, because physical distancing only calls for avoiding contact with those outside their own household, families of the same household may elect to sit together.

Tape should be placed on the floor to mark six (6) foot distances between persons where lines will form for the reception of Holy Communion.

The congregation should be dismissed by sections or rows at the end of Mass to avoid gathering at the exits.

Each parish will be responsible to develop a plan for restroom use based on their particular facility: a limit will be placed on the number of people permitted to enter a restroom at the same time, and tape should be placed on the floor outside of the restroom six feet apart to indicate where people should stand in queue.

Choirs are to be temporarily disbanded.

Singing, especially in close proximity to others, may increase the risk of COVID-19.

VII. Specific Guidelines for Various Parts of the Mass

The priest and other ministers should wear masks during the celebration of Mass, except for the priest-celebrant where a safe distance can be maintained throughout the duration of the liturgy. With this exception, the priest **MUST** be able to maintain a distance of more than 6 feet from the congregation during the entirety of the Mass.

Where possible, the other ministers (deacon, servers, lectors) should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other.

Ministers should maintain a proper distance in the sacristy and during the entrance and recessional processions.

The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) by anyone other than a minister should be omitted.

A deacon or a single server may bring the missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair. The priest may also do this him/herself. After the deacon or server moves away, the priest could come to the altar and arrange the items on the altar.

The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance, either at a credence table near the altar or at the side of the altar itself. After the priest returns to the center of the altar, a server could then remove the lavabo items.

During the collection, the baskets should not be passed from person to person. Long-handled baskets could be acceptable if the ushers can remain a suitable distance from others. Alternatively, baskets could be placed at the entrances to the church where the offerings could be deposited while entering or leaving.

If hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be consecrated, they could be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to proffer the words of consecration directly over the host he will consume, with the other hosts on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he speaks the Eucharistic prayer.

For the elevation of the sacred species at “through him, and with him, and in him ,” if a deacon is present, he/she may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is momentary, he/she need not remain six (6) feet from the priest while doing so.

IIX. The Distribution of Holy Communion

There are two ways for handling the distribution of Holy Communion.

Option 1: Mass without the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful.

In option 1, the faithful are encouraged to enter into a spiritual communion.

While this option is by far the safest option, it is restrictive.

Since being present and actively participating in the Mass is a great good for the faithful, and since it is not strictly necessary that any particular members of the faithful receive Holy Communion at Mass, Mass could be celebrated in which only the priest (or, if a deacon is present, only the priest and deacon) consume the Eucharist. In this case, they would do so in the normal way.

Option 2: Holy Communion immediately at the end of Mass.

This option provides for Holy Communion using precautions. If the faithful have reservations about receiving the species, they are still able to participate in a Spiritual Communion. This should be clearly expressed and communicated. The priest should, in any case, wear a mask for the distribution of Communion. This does not construe the intent of the priest or constitute self-communicating. The priest may elect to wear disposable gloves; however they must be changed in the event that the priest's hands come in direct contact with the communicant. If gloves are not worn, hand sanitizer should be placed at the communion stations for frequent hand hygiene. Because the most recent guidance from the CDC states: "Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food," and "there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging." Communion may be either be pre-packaged or loose in the ciboria.

A sufficient quantity of hosts for distribution to the faithful should be consecrated at the Mass.

The priest would omit the words, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world." And move directly to the quiet prayers before communion, consume the Eucharist in the normal way, but would NOT immediately proceed to distribute Communion to the servers or the faithful.

Rather, the newly consecrated hosts would remain on the altar until the conclusion of the Mass.

After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest remains in the sanctuary. The priest removes his/her chasuble and the deacon removes his/her dalmatic. The priest and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion should use hand sanitizer immediately before approaching the altar.

Vested in an alb and stole, the priest retrieves the newly-consecrated hosts from the altar, and raising the host says, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb."

He/she then leads the people in saying: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

The priest then proceeds to the place prepared for distribution of Communion. Each stands next to a table with hand sanitizer in order to distribute Communion.

The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way.

The priest and ministers may execute hand hygiene as often as deemed necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless contact is made.

Communion in the hand is preferred.

At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest and any other ministers return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle. The faithful may depart after making a brief prayer of thanksgiving.

In cases where the faithful are in their cars (either for a drive-in Mass or drive-up distribution of Holy Communion), the communicants should get out of their cars to receive, one car at a time. This would not constitute a large gathering.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation, as well as your attention to this matter.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. A. Mentz" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Fr. William A. Mentz, V.G., C.F.S. +
Vicar General, Diocese of Pennsylvania