

5.6.21 COVID CHANGES

Our churches are currently not filling to the state restricted guidelines of 60% occupancy. Skipping pews with six feet of distance in the pew leaves Sunday Masses below this percentage of attendance. That fact, coupled with the plentiful access to vaccines and new data, has led the Diocese to accept some less restrictive protocols for Masses. Parishes will now have the **choice** to maintain current protocols, or become less restrictive, depending on their local conditions.

The Diocese will now use guidance from the Centers for Disease, Control and Prevention and the Kentucky Department of Education protocols (links are below) to allow parishes to open their pews and ask parishioners to observe three feet of spacing between households in the pew. There are also no mask restrictions for children under the age of two at liturgies. Choirs can also resume, but they must sit three feet apart and stay masked. Cantors maintaining 8-12 feet of distance can be unmasked. These new protocols go into immediate effect for parish Liturgies.

However, it is even more important now that parishioners properly wear their masks over their nose and mouth throughout the Liturgy, especially when singing. Church congregations that do not enforce masking are still experiencing outbreaks of Covid-19 in their communities.

There are NO CHANGES in the guidelines for the distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue or distributing the chalice to the assembly.

Guidelines have NOT changed for parish hall gatherings or other social gatherings indoors.

These changes allow EVERY pew to be used, but it is important to implement your process in a way that adequately communicates this intent to your parish community. Some suggestions may be: use email to communicate the new instructions; have ushers inform families as they arrive; have someone behind the microphone as families enter church explaining new distancing; announce at Mass this week for next week's services; use new pew tapes/markers. But parishes can also have the option of removing all tapes, ropes, and restrictive seating markers.

These new restrictions, combined with the large number of people who are vaccinated, still provides our communities with a safe liturgy. We also encourage parishes to continue streaming services, as the Bishop will continue allowing the dispensation for the Sunday obligation for parishioners who feel vulnerable.

IN SUMMARY

- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation remains in place.
- Three-foot distance should be maintained between households.
 - Pastors may choose to enforce the current, more restrictive protocols (i.e., six-foot distance).
- All pews may be opened.
- Children aged two and under are not required to wear a mask.
- It is imperative that **everyone** over the age of two be masked properly.
- Choirs may resume but must be masked and placed three feet apart.
- Cantors may be unmasked if at least 8-12 feet apart.
- Holy Communion may be distributed only under the form of bread and in the hand only – not on the tongue.

The new guidelines (changes) are posted below:

<https://owensborodiocese.org/covid-2019/>

Additional reference sites are below:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

<https://education.ky.gov/comm/Pages/COVID-19-Updates.aspx>