

ROMAN CATHOLIC

DIOCESE *of* PROVIDENCE

**Updated Diocesan Directives for Priests
in response to the COVID-19 Outbreak**

**Effective Saturday, May 30, 2020
*The Vigil of the Solemnity of Pentecost***

INTRODUCTION

On March 17, 2020, the Office of Divine Worship communicated sacramental directives in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. These measures aimed to protect the health and safety of local communities in the Diocese of Providence, especially vulnerable populations. As the health crisis continues to evolve, so must the diocesan response. The following points modify the aforementioned directives of March 17.

No directives will ever perfectly balance the right of the faithful to receive spiritual goods with the concomitant obligation to protect the health and safety of everyone. The following directives are prudential judgments and may require continued adaptation. While not exhaustive, they do provide possible solutions for the myriad challenges continuing to surface.

In early March, Bishop Tobin dispensed the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation. Bishop Tobin has extended this dispensation for the faithful of the Diocese of Providence until further notice.

The suspension of public liturgies is lifted and Sunday Masses may begin with the Vigil of the Solemnity of Pentecost on **Saturday, May 30, 2020**. Daily Masses may begin on **Monday, June 1, 2020**.

Wherever possible, priests are encouraged to live-stream the celebration of the Mass for parishioners who prudently choose to remain at home.

While limited access to the celebration of Mass will be permitted, those who are elderly, have underlying health conditions, or are otherwise vulnerable to risk of infection are encouraged to stay home in accordance with the most recent guidelines drafted by health officials. As painful as this may be, this recommendation serves to protect the members of our broader community who might be more susceptible to the acute risks of COVID-19. Likewise, **under no circumstances** may anyone who manifests symptoms of any illness attend the public celebration of Mass.

Each pastor should devise a proposed plan, detailing the ways he will implement the following directives given his parish's unique circumstances. It would be helpful if pastors made this plan readily available to parishioners through social media or other electronic means. We expect that our parishes will resume public worship in a phased approach. It is not required to begin right away, as some parishes may take longer than others. Patience and prudence will be necessary as this process may continue over an extended period of time.

THE PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF HOLY MASS

1. Public access to the celebration of Mass must be limited to **25%** of the fire department stated capacity for occupancy of the church.
2. In all instances, those entering the building must maintain the required distance of at least **6 feet** at all times. This does not apply to members of families living in the same household.
3. In order to facilitate the above, a pastor might rope off pews between parishioners and mark places where they may sit.
4. Limiting access to the Mass will be difficult. It may be appropriate to have a "sign-up" or reservation mechanism (e.g., through telephone or electronic means). Alternatively, parish staff may initiate a schedule that chooses certain parishioners for certain Masses (e.g., alphabetically rotating on a weekly basis). Another option would be for a parish to set up a ticket system, where parishioners can receive an allotted ticket before the Mass. Some parishes may be unable to incorporate these suggestions.
5. A parish may use only one entrance before Mass to help implement occupancy guidelines.
6. All holy water fonts should remain empty; the sign of peace and the distribution of Holy Communion with the Precious Blood remains suspended.
7. Whenever possible, windows and doors should remain open to help circulate fresh air into the church.
8. It may be appropriate to have a secure receptacle where parishioners place their budget envelopes before or after Mass. There will be no offertory procession. "Passing the basket" should be avoided.
9. A pastor may adjust the Mass schedule; but he is not required to do so. Priests may not celebrate more Masses than those permitted by law (i.e., two Masses on a weekday and three Masses on a Sunday). A priest may not celebrate the liturgy for Sunday Mass on a weekday.
10. At the conclusion of **every** Mass, all pews, door knobs, and other commonly used surfaces must be thoroughly sanitized.
 - a) The pastor may ask volunteers to help sanitize these items. Simple cleaning solutions may be used. Whoever sanitizes must wear gloves and a face mask to protect himself.

- b) Pastors could invite parishioners to bring sanitizing wipes with them (if they are not provided) and wipe down the pews themselves.
11. All parishioners are strongly encouraged to wear masks or other face coverings for the entirety of the celebration of Mass. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under the age of 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
 12. All parishioners must sanitize their hands upon entry to the church.
 - a) A portable dispenser with hand sanitizer should be available at the entrance to the church.
 - b) Parishioners may use their own hand sanitizer.
 13. Hymnals and missalettes are to be removed from the church.
 14. Music may still remain a part of Mass. The use of choirs is discouraged, however. It is sufficient to have an organist and cantor. Because of the risk of the spread of aerosolized particles, singing among the congregation should be limited.
 15. As few people as possible should remain in the sanctuary during Mass. Since the priest remains at a substantial distance from other ministers and the congregation, he should not wear a mask during Mass. A priest may, however, wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion.
 16. Holy Communion may be distributed to the faithful in a manner which respects the sublime dignity of the Most Blessed Sacrament while preventing the spread of germs. Undoubtedly, no solution will obviate all risk of infection. The following points may help a pastor undertake a legitimate and measured approach. *For additional points on this matter, please see the Appendix with information from infectious disease specialist and permanent deacon, Dr. Timothy Flanigan.*
 - a) Parishioners should be reminded at the start of every Mass that it is not required to receive Holy Communion and that they may legitimately remain in their pew and make an act of spiritual communion.
 - b) After the "fraction rite" and after he personally communicates the Sacred Species, the priest dips his fingers in an ablution cup filled with clean water and wipes them on a fresh purificator or finger towel. The priest may—but is not required to—put on a mask. He then sanitizes his hands before distributing Holy Communion.
 - c) In addition to the priest, a deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion approaches each communion station and properly sanitizes his or her hands before distribution of Holy Communion. Each minister stands next to a table with a cloth, ablution cup, and a bottle of hand sanitizer in case he or she needs to sanitize his or her hands again.

- d) Parishioners come up pew by pew, as normal. But while “in line,” parishioners must maintain 6 feet distance from one another.
 - e) The faithful are encouraged to receive Holy Communion in the hand while wearing their masks, and then remove their masks to receive the Sacred Host. Nevertheless, it is not permitted to refuse Holy Communion to those who wish to receive on the tongue. It may be helpful for those who wish to receive on the tongue to do so at the end, after everyone else has already received. If, for reasons of health, a priest is uncomfortable, he may refrain from distributing Holy Communion himself and choose a deacon or Extraordinary Minister to distribute Holy Communion instead.
 - f) Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand by a member of the faithful wearing gloves.
 - g) If the priest or other minister senses that his fingers have inadvertently made contact with a person, he should sanitize his hands. It is not necessary to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless the minister makes actual contact.
 - h) The distribution of Holy Communion takes place in the context of Mass. The one exception is Viaticum.
 - i) Holy Communion may not be distributed to the faithful using illicit means, such as plastic cups, saucers, bags, etc.
 - j) Holy Communion must be distributed individually by a priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. It may not be placed on a paten or some other item (e.g., plastic plate) for the faithful to take for themselves.
17. To avoid congregating, the faithful should depart Mass intermittently. There should be a plan in place to facilitate a safe exit. For the time being, prolonged visits in the church before or after Mass are not encouraged.
18. Pastors must continue to offer Mass for regularly scheduled intentions, as well as the required *pro populo* Mass, even if celebrated privately.

**THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION:
BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, EUCHARIST**

1. Priests and deacons may celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism. The requirements of appropriate distancing as described above must be maintained accordingly.
2. The pastor may decide to baptize, confirm, and distribute first Holy Communion to the catechumens who normally would have received the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The pastor has the faculty to confirm, by the law itself, those he baptizes or receives into full communion into the Catholic Church (cf. can. 883).

3. Bishop Tobin has also granted to all pastors, administrators, and parochial vicars the faculty to confirm previously baptized Catholics over the age of seven years beginning June 1, 2020 and extending through December 31, 2020.
4. Any ceremony which would generate a larger congregation above the limits determined by health officials is not permitted. Thus, if the pastor wishes to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with many candidates, this must be postponed. The same principle applies to celebrations of first Holy Communion. A pastor may decide to separate the candidates for these sacraments into smaller groups.

THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING: PENANCE AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK

1. The directives of March 17, 2020 remain in effect; namely, priests may continue to celebrate the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Penance so long as they observe appropriate distancing and other precautions.
2. As a reminder, the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be conferred using an approved instrument (e.g., cotton ball or cotton swab). After the celebration of the sacrament, the cotton is burned or buried. Should a parish run low on Oil for the Sick blessed by the Bishop, please contact the Office of Divine Worship at 278-4587.
3. Priests will continue to hear confessions and celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Priests are to take reasonable precautions between the penitent and confessor, maintaining 6 feet distance. The confessional kneeler or chair should be sanitized before and after use.
4. Anointing COVID-19 patients
A team of priests has been deputed to anoint COVID-19 patients. These priests have been trained according to the most up to date guidelines from health experts. They have also received the required "personal protective equipment" (PPE) in order to carry out the sacrament while maintaining their own protection. Father Al Ranallo will provide to all parishes a list of the names and contact information of these priests. If a parish receives a call to anoint a COVID-19 patient, the parish must direct the call to the nearest available priest on the team. **Any priest who would like to assist in anointing COVID-19 patients should call Father Al Ranallo to sign-up and receive the necessary PPE and training.**

CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGES

The pastor may permit the celebration of marriages (including within the context of Mass) so long as he adopts the same guidelines for limited access to public spaces and proper sanitization, as described above. Marriages may only be celebrated after all canonical requisites have been fulfilled and after a civil license has been obtained.

CELEBRATION OF FUNERALS

The pastor may permit Masses of Christian Burial and other funeral rites in the church so long as he adopts the same guidelines for limited access to public spaces and proper sanitization, as described above.

DAILY MASS CHAPELS

The parish should suspend all Masses in smaller "Daily Mass Chapels." All public Masses should be celebrated in the parish church, which is larger.

OTHER LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS AND DEVOTIONS

Other liturgical celebrations or devotions (e.g., recitation of the Holy Rosary, adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament) are permitted so long as pastors adopt the same guidelines for limited access to public spaces and proper sanitization, as described above.

OUTDOOR MASSES

The celebration of the Holy Mass outdoors is not encouraged. Only with the written permission of the local Ordinary may a priest celebrate Mass outdoors. The priest must consult with the Office of Divine Worship before making any plans for an outdoor Mass.

APPENDIX

A MESSAGE FROM DR. TIMOTHY FLANIGAN

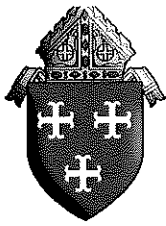
Many Rhode Islanders are looking forward with great anticipation to being able to go back to Mass and receive our Lord in Holy Communion. Communion will be provided by the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion with good hand hygiene as recommended by the CDC.

It is always important to remember that no person is obliged to receive Holy Communion. If persons are very worried about viral transmission, they may choose to forgo receiving Communion and can make an act of spiritual communion.

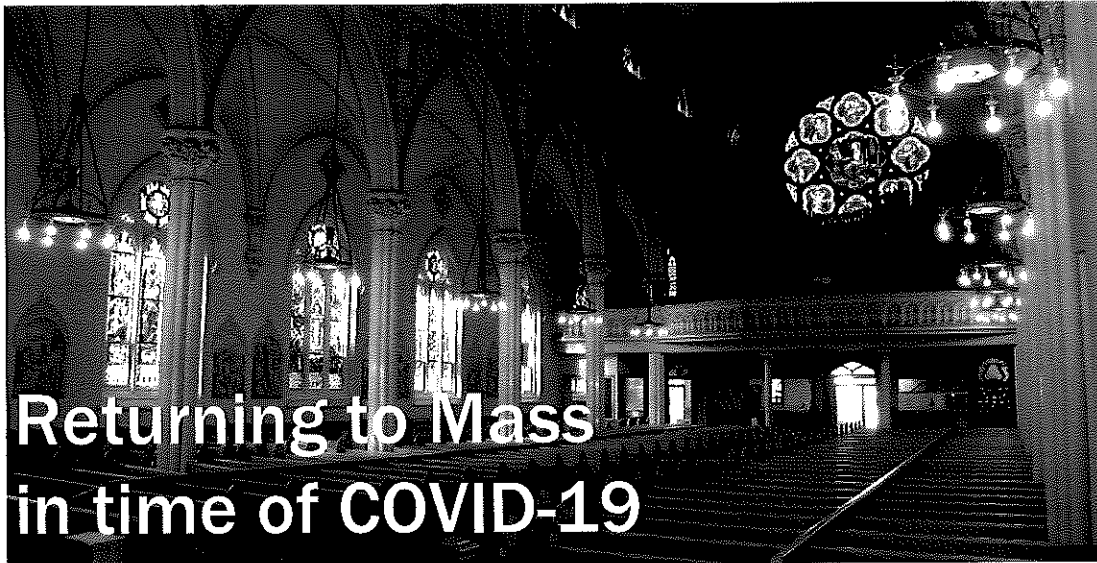
Individuals who desire to receive on the tongue may be asked to receive Holy Communion after others have received and therefore they might receive at the end of the line or at a separate line.

An Extraordinary Minister who distributes Holy Communion on the tongue may wish to use hand sanitizer between each communicant and of course afterwards. Holy Communion on the tongue can be provided safely by an experienced minister who uses careful hand hygiene.

Timothy P. Flanigan, MD is a permanent deacon in the Diocese of Providence and Professor of Medicine at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. He also works at the Division of Infectious Disease for the Miriam and Rhode Island Hospitals in Providence, RI.



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"We don't know the details of the future, but we know that our lives will not end in emptiness and frustration ... Because we have hope, we live differently. Because of our hope, we will learn from the past, and will embrace the future with a renewed confidence and a joyful, invincible spirit."

—Most Rev. Thomas J. Tobin, D.D., Bishop of Providence

The advent of the novel coronavirus has marked our community substantially over the past two months. Whether directly succumbing to the disease it causes, or experiencing its far-reaching economic and emotional effects, all of us have been affected in some way. In an effort to protect the health and safety of our local communities, especially vulnerable populations, Bishop Tobin suspended the public celebration of Mass in March. This was a painful, but necessary decision in view of the common good. As the state begins its phased approach to re-open sectors of our community, the public celebration of Mass will resume on **May 30, 2020**, the Vigil of the Solemnity of Pentecost. This is a joyous moment for our local Church as we gather again as the Body of Christ. Resuming the public celebration of Mass will look differently than before, given the recommendations of health experts. The following points highlight some of these changes.

1. Catholics will continue to be dispensed from Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses

While public Masses will resume, vulnerable populations, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions are asked to follow the most up to date health regulations and remain at home. There are many who might feel uncomfortable returning to Mass. They, too, have legitimate reason to remain at home. Bishop Tobin has extended the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Day Masses until further notice.

2. Access to Mass will be limited

In order to prevent risk of infection, attendance at Mass will be limited to a percentage of the church's capacity as specified in the fire code. Some parishes will request a "reservation" or ticket system, or find ways to split up parishioners alphabetically in as equitable a manner as possible.

3. Hand hygiene and masks are key

Parishioners will be expected to sanitize their hands immediately upon entry to the church. Likewise, they must wear a mask at all times, with the exception of receiving Holy Communion.

4. Pews will be sectioned off

In order to maintain six feet distance between parishioners, parishes will mark off sections of pews where parishioners can safely sit.

5. Singing will be limited

Because of the risk of infection due to increased aerosolized particles, singing must be limited. Hymnals will be removed from churches.

6. Parishioners will receive Holy Communion in a safe manner

Parishioners will take off their masks to receive Holy Communion, but the priest or other minister may wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion. The priest or other minister will always sanitize his hands before this time, and whenever he accidentally comes into contact with a person. Parishioners are encouraged to receive Holy Communion on the hand; but another option would be to refrain from receiving Holy Communion and make an act of spiritual communion instead.

7. The church will be sanitized after every Mass

To ensure everyone's safety, parish staff or volunteers will sanitize commonly touched surfaces and pews before and after every celebration of Mass.

8. Budget envelopes will be submitted prior to Mass or as you leave

Instead of "passing the basket," a secure receptacle should be available so parishioners can drop off their budget envelopes before or after Mass.

9. Avoid personal contact with anyone

The sign of peace remains suspended; physical contact must be avoided at all costs.

10. Those who are sick must stay home

Anyone who has symptoms of any sickness (even mild symptoms) may not attend the public celebration of Mass.

