



Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Saint Cloud

214 3RD AVENUE SOUTH - BOX 1248
ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA 56302
TELEPHONE (320) 251-2340
FAX (320) 258-7618

March 19, 2021

Dear pastor,

Greetings to you on this Solemnity of Saint Joseph, which we celebrate during this special year commemorating the 150th anniversary of his declaration as Patron of the Universal Church. May God continue to bless you in your service as spiritual fathers to all those entrusted to your pastoral care.

I write today to offer a few updates regarding our pandemic protocols and to address a few topics about which some of you have written to me with questions:

- **Festivals and other parish celebrations:** With the arrival of spring, I know many parishes are discussing the possibility of having summer and fall festivals or special parish milestone celebrations. These gatherings can be wonderful community-building and fundraising opportunities. I remain concerned, however, about the threat of COVID-19 that still looms over our communities. Although vaccines are becoming more widely available, it will still be some time before everyone has an opportunity to receive one. Recent news reports indicate an uptick in cases among younger people in Minnesota, and health officials are concerned about the possible threat this may pose to more vulnerable populations. Parish festivals also add a layer of unpredictability when it comes to physical distancing as well as risks related to food and beverage service/consumption and sanitization. Therefore, at this time, in the interest of health and safety, festivals and similar parish celebrations remain prohibited until further notice. I continue to monitor the COVID situation and will update this directive as warranted. In lieu of these celebrations, I encourage parishes to consider organizing raffles (as some of you did last year) and drive-thru/takeout food options. While we continue to look forward to a time when parishioners can gather together again safely in celebration, I hope these latter options will help with parishes' annual fundraising efforts.
- **Funeral luncheons and wedding receptions:** These gatherings also remain prohibited until further notice.
- **Church capacity limits lifted:** As you may know, Gov. Walz lifted percentage and capacity limits for religious services, effective March 15. We will follow this guidance in the diocese. Please note, however, that worship services still must follow the diocese's social-distancing and mask requirements.
- **Altar servers and sprinkling rite.** Effective on Palm Sunday, I am permitting the use again of the Sprinkling Rite following the guidelines attached to this email. I have also received questions about the use of altar servers. A reminder about the protocols regarding altar servers is also included in the attached guidelines.
- **Frequency of sanitation:** Because of the lower threat they pose to spreading the virus, hymnals and pews can be cleaned as established in your cleaning schedule but do not need to be sanitized more than once a day. However, high-contact surfaces such as door knobs, microphones and restroom facilities should be sanitized often. Please encourage your parishioners to use hand sanitizer when entering the church building and before receiving Communion as a further way to limit the spread of the virus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Donald J. Kettler
Bishop, Diocese of Saint Cloud

Updated Guidelines for Sprinkling Rite and Altar Servers

Effective Palm Sunday Bishop Kettler is permitting the use of the Sprinkling Rite. In addition, we have had several inquiries about the use of Altar Servers. As a reminder, Altar Servers can minister following the guidelines below.

Sprinkling Rite

- Use of the Sprinkling Rite is to be in accordance with the *Roman Missal*.
- Done by priest alone.
- Priest must wear a mask.
- The most direct route is to be considered.
- The Holy Water used must be used only for this purpose (i.e. it should not be taken from a font prepared for baptism).

Altar Servers

- Altar Servers are to wear masks at all times.
- Physical distance of 6 feet or more must be maintained between households at all times.
- They should wash their hands before Mass begins and again when it has concluded.
- Altar Servers may participate in the entrance procession and recessional.
- The presider should continue to hold the *Roman Missal* or use some other methods to pray the orations. Altar Servers are not to hold the *Roman Missal* or any other book/folder for the presider.
- Altar Servers may dress the altar.
- Altar Servers are not to assist with the *lavabo* (washing of hands).