



Further Sacramental & Other Considerations for the Archdiocese of Hartford Regarding the Coronavirus

March 17, 2020

As publicly announced in a message dated March 16, 2020, in light of what the CDC has issued on March 15th regarding the cancellation or postponement of large events and mass gatherings of more than 50 people, and given the March 16th mandate of Governor Ned Lamont requiring the closure of all restaurants, bars, gyms and movie theaters, the Archdiocese of Hartford has cancelled all weekend and weekday Masses, effective Tuesday, March 17, 2020, in the churches of the Archdiocese (the counties of Hartford, Litchfield, and New Haven) through April 3, 2020. Priests will celebrate a daily Mass alone with no congregation, remembering in prayer all who are affected by the pandemic. Parishes will be encouraged to make provision for their churches to be open at some time so that individuals can still come and pray.

This present document is meant to provide further specificity and guidance, and the Archdiocese will continue to issue updates as further questions and new developments arise, particularly with regard to Holy Week and Easter.

Priest(s) Celebrating Mass

Every priest should continue to offer a daily Mass, preferably at the main altar of the closed church, and with no congregation, however small. If it is a concelebration by more than one priest present, then care should be taken about sharing the chalice, purifying the vessels and changing the linens.

In parishes where Mass intentions have already been set for a given day, the daily Mass of the priest(s) should be offered for that intention. If no intention is scheduled, then it would be very appropriate for the Mass to be offered “*pro populo*,” for the parishioners, with a prayer for their health and the strengthening of their faith. Mass intentions that are not able to be offered at this time should be rescheduled for a later date.

Open Churches

Although no public Masses are to be celebrated during this period, the faithful should not be totally deprived of the opportunity to visit a church and pray before the Blessed Sacrament or to venerate a sacred image of our Lady or the saints.

To that end, pastors should make a prudent judgment about opening the church at a time and for a period during which parishioners can make a private visit. Perhaps a posting can be made on the door or an internet posting can be made. An opening will no doubt vary widely from place to place. Nothing should be done to facilitate or encourage large groups of people, and social distancing reminders should be made. It may become necessary to step back from this approach in order to comply with civil recommendations regarding social distancing and the maximum number that should gather in one place.

It is also very desirable that there be Eucharistic adoration, but without ceremony and without announcing it in such a way that a large group of people would come at one time. Adoration is a fitting opportunity for priests themselves to spend time in prayer interceding for our nation and world at a time of crisis. The silent presence of a priest in prayer would be a great encouragement to those who come to pray themselves.

Spontaneous vocal prayers may arise from those present in the church at a given time, but no devotions (stations, novenas, rosaries) should be preannounced in a way that draws a larger group of people at one time

When churches are open, please follow all the guidelines regarding sanitizing (for people, items, and the church itself) as have been issued in the recent days.

Live Streaming & Television

While Masses are to be celebrated without any congregation, priests are free to stream their Mass online for the benefit of their parishioners if the parish has the ability to do so. If the parish is interested in this option, please contact David Elliott, the Archdiocesan Associate Director of Communications (David.Elliott@AOHCT.org), for more information and for assistance in determining whether this is a possibility in a particular church.

All priests are also strongly encouraged, with whatever means are available to them, to inform their weekday and weekend parishioners about the television Mass broadcast each day by the Office of Radio & Television. Next Sunday, March 22, Archbishop Blair will be celebrating the televised Mass.

The television Mass is broadcast seven days a week at 10:00 AM on WCCT-TV (WB20) and WCTX-TV (MyTV9). It can also be viewed Saturday and Sunday at 5:00 AM on WCCT-TV. The Mass from ORTV can also be found streaming live at these times on <http://www.ortv.org/streaming/streaming.htm>.

Contributions

Though parishioners are unable to attend Mass during this period, it goes without saying that their continuing financial support of the parish is crucial for its ongoing operation and obligations to employees, etc. This is also true of the Archdiocese at a time when the Appeal is underway. Even if parishioners are simply holding on to their weekly envelopes with the intention of turning them all in when Masses resume, this does not solve the parish's need to meet its obligations in the meantime.

Pastors are invited to share ideas on ways to facilitate the weekly offerings of parishioners and support for the church at this time, in keeping with sound financial practice as set forth in governmental and archdiocesan regulations, and also with great sensitivity to the financial hardships that the epidemic may cause for some people and the grief and sadness that will inevitably arise from the deaths of those who succumb to it.

One simple and very effective way of facilitating contributions in these weeks is through online giving, which makes it possible for parishioners to contribute to the parish from anywhere at any time. Encouraging online giving is a significant way of increasing contributions even apart from the challenges posed by the current pandemic. If your parish does not currently utilize online giving, please contact the one of the following members of the Archdiocesan Finance Office: Matt Byrne (Matt.Byrne@AOHCT.org), Dean Walford (Dean.Walford@AOHCT.org), or Veena Gowda (Veena.Gowda@AOHCT.org). They will assist you in finding out how simple it is to set up online giving through Our Sunday Visitor or another vendor

Funerals

Unless it is already scheduled and planned, all funeral Masses are suspended. Additionally, wake services at funeral homes are not to be recommended. Priests are allowed to celebrate the "Rite of Committal with Final Commendation" at the graveside. Participation at such services should be limited to immediate family and close friends only, and their number must be in keeping with the limits established by the civil authorities.

A Mass for the repose of the soul of the deceased, as provided for in the *Roman Missal*, can be added to the parish Mass intentions and offered as soon as reasonably possible under the circumstances, or, if the family desires, a public celebration of this Mass at a later date can be contemplated.

Weddings

The celebration of weddings may continue if the couple does not wish to reschedule, but without Mass, using "The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass" in the ritual book. Participation should be regulated in keeping with the limits established by the civil authorities.

Sacrament of Penance

Pastorally it is important that the faithful not be denied access to the Sacrament of Penance. What is scheduled at parishes during Lent should continue to be offered, but only with individual confessions and no penance services. Every precaution should be taken to ensure social distancing between priest and penitent, preferably with a screen between them rather than face to face. That screen should be sufficiently covered (e.g. filters, coverings, etc.) to create a safe barrier between the priest and penitent.

Baptisms

If parents would rather not delay the Baptism of their child, it may take place in church, but participants should be as limited as possible in keeping with the limits established by the civil authorities.

Anointing of the Sick & Pastoral Visits

It is a priestly obligation to minister to the sick and to provide the sacraments for the dying. However, it is also incumbent on the clergy to protect their own health. This means following with extreme care the directives of health care professionals with regard to protective masks and clothing in approaching those who are stricken with the virus, and being cautious with anyone who is ill or infirm. Older priests and those with compromised health should avoid ministering during the pandemic.

In administering the Sacrament of the Sick to coronavirus patients, great care should be taken not to contaminate the oil of the sick. A repeated dipping of the thumb in the oil for forehead and hands risks such contamination. Since priests themselves can bless the Oil of the Sick, cotton balls dipped in oil can be blessed using the prayer in the ritual, and then used individually and disposed of afterward in an appropriate way, even by the hospital itself.

In light of the dangers posed by the pandemic, any pastoral visits to the homebound by priests, deacons, or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be carried out with great caution and social distancing, and only if pastorally necessary in the judgment of the pastor. Any number of televised or online Catholic programs, including Mass, can be recommended to the homebound.

RCIA

In light of the suspension of public Masses, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults may need to be adapted. Rituals of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, including Scrutinies and Presentations, should not be celebrated in person. The OEEC will provide further directives as to how to proceed with these components of RCIA through other means. Communication will take place through the RCIA points of contact. If you are concerned that your parish does not have an RCIA point of contact, call the OEEC directly at 860-242-5573.

Meetings and Events

Priests are asked to keep any parish meetings to an absolute minimum and in keeping with the limits established by the civil authorities and the need for social distancing.

Archdiocesan Schools

In response to the March 15th mandate of Governor Lamont requiring the closure of all Connecticut schools through at least March 31st, all Archdiocesan high schools and parochial schools will also be closed through March 31st.

Your understanding and cooperation are appreciated in keeping up with the many updates that have been issued in recent days and in abiding by what the CDC, the state of Connecticut, and the Archdiocese have laid down to be followed. As the situation continues to develop, you will be kept updated. If you wish to reference the documents and guidelines that have been issued, please go to archdioceseofhartford.org/coronavirus.