

From the Pastor

Since the beginning of the COVID experience—from before the lockdown—we have tried to balance prudence with due reverence. In February of 2020 I explained:

When I distribute communion in the front of Church, I remain on the step to maximize the “safe” angle for distributing Holy Communion without touching one’s mouth. If giving communion in the back of church, if I encounter someone taller, I may have to rotate my hand to obtain the maximum safe angle. Please do not mistake this with an intention to be irreverent with the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar...

I also said that

Distributing communion [kneeling at the altar rail], in my opinion is the SAFEST way of all. Kneeling, the host can be placed on the tongue at about a 45-degree angle. In my years of distributing Holy Communion at Our Lady of Lourdes in Philadelphia, where the altar rail is used at all Masses, I do not recall EVER coming into contact with one’s mouth when they received communion kneeling.

When we were in complete lockdown for over 2 weeks, we found creative ways to ensure that our parishioners could receive Holy Communion. We went above and beyond many of the parishes in our area.

When we came back into church, although the guidelines seem to allow only for communion in the hand, Bishop Scharfenberger, who was at that time our apostolic administrator, told the priests in a ZOOM meeting that we could not refuse Holy Communion on the tongue. At that time, we scrupulously sanitized our hands after EVERY communion on the tongue. We did this for some



time until I read the guidelines of the Diocese of Albany, where our administrator was bishop, that advise sanitizing only if the priest’s fingers came in contact with the mouth. We started doing this. I can tell you that I have not come into contact with tongues or lips in some time, but touch about 5 – 6 hands every weekend.

As we informed you at Mass two weeks ago, some parishioners had expressed concern about receiving Holy Communion after someone had received on the tongue. Fears of transmission of COVID have led them to not receive Holy Communion at all. I do not want anyone to be deprived of Holy Communion out of concerns about COVID transmission. I emphasize, once again, as I have on so many occasions, WE WILL MAKE ACCOMODATIONS TO RECEIVE COMMUNION AFTER MASS OR AT OTHER TIMES FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT BE FEARFUL.

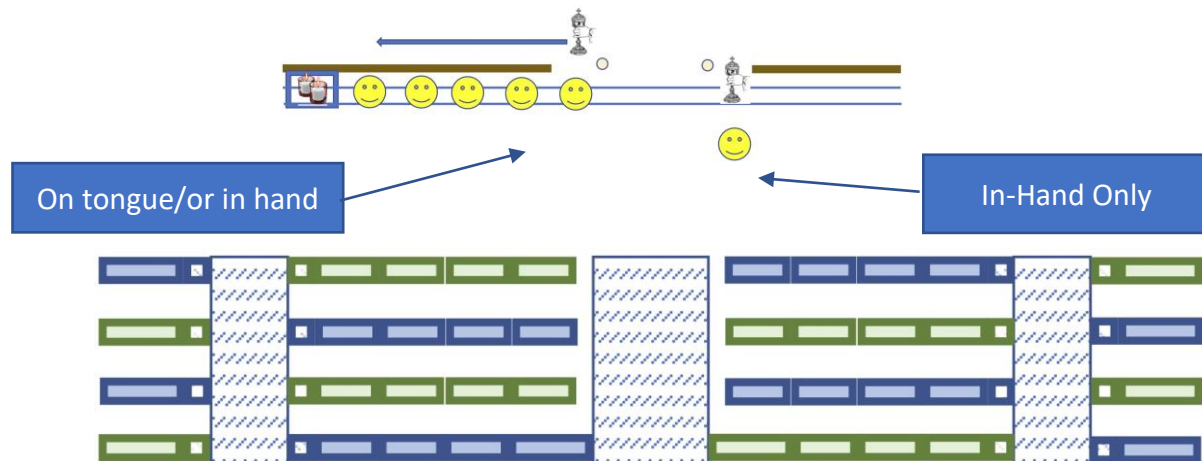
This being said, as long as I am pastor of Our Lady of Mercy and St. Brigid Parish, we will:

1. Not refuse Holy Communion on the tongue until this virus has dissipated, because experience should now tell us the virus will NEVER dissipate. It will continue to mutate and there will always be new viruses.
2. Follow the MOST RECENT diocesan guidelines to the best of our ability and not impose greater restrictions than those required.

3. Not allow spiritual well-being to be put below the concerns of this world. Too many continue to suffer, mainly in institutions and facilities, without the sacraments because some bureaucrat has decided that it is too *dangerous*.

Therefore, I make this proposal on an *ad experimentum* basis to begin this weekend. Beginning with the front of the church (both sides) communicants will come forward. There will be no guidance from the ushers. Those who wish to receive Holy Communion directly on the tongue may line up at the altar rail on the Our Lady of Mercy side (left), either kneeling or standing (There is room for 5 communicants at a time and the choice belongs to the communicant). The priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister will distribute to those lined along the step/rail moving out from the center, and returning to the center, repeating the process, for the next group.

Those receiving in the hand can approach the communion station toward the pulpit/St. Joseph side, where communion will be distributed only in the hand. [If there are spaces available on the OLM side, and the communicant does not mind receiving Holy Communion after someone received on the tongue, they are also welcomed to go to Communion on that side, lining up in the spaces along the rail.]



Communicants can return to their seats using either of the side aisles. Just move carefully and be aware of your surroundings as to not bump into people. We should not be in a hurry when receiving Holy Communion. It is an intimate moment of Communion with Our Lord and one another.

If there is not an extra minister or extraordinary minister to give communion to the handicapped row and those less ambulatory throughout the church at the beginning of Holy Communion distribution, the minister will come back after finishing in the front. If someone NOT in the handicapped pews needs communion brought to them, please stand in your place when the ministers are finishing in the front. They will be instructed to look out into the congregation before returning the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle.

****NOTE****

FYI: When I had COVID in August, for contact tracing Genesee County considered close proximity to be **within 6 feet** for a period of time **greater than 10 minutes**.

- Fr. Matthew