**Opening Churches for Public Worship In the Archdiocese of Hartford**

Updated: May 26, 2020

As of Monday, June 8, 2020, parishes of the Archdiocese of Hartford can reopen for the public celebration of weekday Masses only, provided that no more than a total of fifty (50) socially distanced persons are present at a given Mass in keeping with the limitation currently set by the civil authorities, and provided that a parish is in compliance with the directives in this document. Pastors may consider the possibility of more than one Mass a day (for example, a second Mass in the evening) if circumstances warrant it and all the requirements for safe opening are followed.

As for Sunday Mass, the dispensation from the Sunday obligation previously granted to all Catholics of the archdiocese by the Archbishop has now been extended through Sunday, September 6, 2020. This will remain in effect even when the public celebration of Sunday Mass resumes, hopefully in the very near future.

While many churches can accommodate a congregation of 50 socially distanced people, those churches that cannot will have to limit participation accordingly. If a parish has more than one church, serious consideration should be given to start by only opening one church, so that the parish can concentrate on having Mass safely in that one place.

Current live streaming and videos of Mass (weekday and Sunday) should continue so that those who cannot attend will be able to participate and remain connected with the parish.

**Baptisms, Wedding Masses and Funeral Masses**

Also as of June 8, Baptisms, Weddings Masses and Funeral Masses can resume, but only if all the procedures and precautions given in this document for weekday Mass are applied appropriately to every aspect of these special celebrations, i.e. social distancing of at least 6 feet, the handling and sanitizing of objects, very limited music without congregational singing, no worship aids, etc. Social distancing of at least 6 feet, masks, and sanitizing are especially important for the movement of anyone outside the pews.

Every effort should be made to inform parishioners at large that they are not under the obligation to attend Mass until further notice and that the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, those who are fearful or anxious, and those who are taking care of a sick or homebound person need not be concerned if they miss Mass. Parishioners should also be advised that there may not be sufficient room at every weekday Mass for all who wish to attend, and that they may not be able to sit in their accustomed pew. If they do come they must wear a face mask unless prevented by an underlying medical condition and must observe all the required precautions. Ultimately each person is responsible to determine whether he or she should attend.

**The Celebration of Weekday Mass**

1. Any priest, minister or volunteer who has a respiratory infection of any kind should not be at Mass.

2. With reasonable exceptions allowed, there should be no public access to the sacristy while the church is open. Gloves should be used by sacristans in the handling of objects.

3. No social gatherings either before or after Mass, including the parking lot.

4. All members of the congregation need to wear masks, with a few exceptions:

* Children under the age of two should not wear masks.
* Parents should judge for children between the ages of two and five whether they should wear a mask.
* All people who claim an exemption for a legitimate health reason (one that does not pose a risk to others) can forego wearing a mask.

5. Except while distributing Holy Communion, in the sanctuary the priest/deacon and any others should not wear masks, but must maintain strict social distancing of at least 6 feet. (Social distancing of at least 6 feet will greatly limit what a deacon can do at the altar).

6. Given that celebrations will be for 50 people or less, if there are to be any ministers at all, they should be limited to a single reader/server (adults not children) and/or a single musician/instrumentalist, socially distanced, with no congregational singing at all, since singing has been shown to spread the virus easily. (Health experts indicate that singing produces 6-10 times more droplets from our mouths than recitation.) The elderly and those with health issues should refrain from these functions. There should be no processions, neither entrance nor recessional, other than from the sacristy, and no offertory procession.

7. Just before beginning Mass the priest should sanitize his hands.

8. Orations should be prayed at the altar so there is no need for someone to hold the missal.

9. As mentioned above, there must be no passing of a basket for the offertory; instead, a collection box can be placed in the church.

10. During the consecration, hosts to be distributed should be placed on a second corporal to the side, so that they are not directly in front of the priest.

11. There should be no holding of hands during the Our Father and no invitation to exchange a sign of peace.

12. At Communion time the congregation can be reminded that they should not feel obliged to receive Holy Communion if they feel the risk is too high, or for any other reason, and can make an act of Spiritual Communion at their place.

13. If the priest himself is a member of a vulnerable population, a deacon or a trained lay minister should distribute Communion.

14. Congregants who are not coming forward to receive Holy Communion or a blessing should still get out of their pews at the beginning so that no one will have to climb over anyone else.

15. All Communion lines should be single file, with people wearing masks, approaching row by row and keeping six feet apart, except for family members. Neither the priest nor the communicants should wear gloves during the distribution of Holy Communion.

16. The priest will hold the consecrated host over the communicants’ outstretched hands and drop the host into their hands without touching their hands. There will be no distribution of the Precious Blood.

17. Communicants will receive the consecrated host in their hand, step to the side, lower their mask, consume the host, replace their mask, and return to their pew. 5

18. The priest will have a table next to him with hand sanitizer. In the case of unintentional contact, the priest will sanitize his own hands immediately.

19. Tape on the floor should indicate where to stand as a communicant approaches to receive Communion. There also will be tape on the floor to show where to stand to unmask and consume the host, and arrows showing how to return to the pews.

20. There should be a couple of minutes after Communion for silent prayer, before the final prayer and dismissal.

21. At the end of Mass people should observe safe distancing in exiting, pew by pew, even at the direction of a volunteer if the numbers warrant.

22. After Mass, the priest is to sanitize carefully all the vessels as well as his hands.

23. Communion on the tongue should be excluded for the sake of the health of others, with the understanding that it will be allowed at a later date when it is safe to do so. If people insist, they can be given Communion only after everyone else has received, and the priest should sanitize his hands immediately, even after a single Communion, if his hand touches the communicant’s mouth in any way.

**Confirmation and the RCIA**

The parameters that have been set for weekday Masses apply to parish Confirmation and those things pertaining to the RCIA. The Archbishop has already indicated that he will grant the necessary delegation to Confirm to those pastors who request it. A copy of the ritual text to be used (English and/or Spanish) will be provided to those pastors who receive the delegation. They can be held at the discretion of the pastor beginning any time after June 8, with (for now) no more than 50 persons, socially distanced, etc.

**Sacrament of Penance**

As of June 8 the ban on any publicly scheduled confessions is lifted. However, at the discretion of the pastor (for himself and other priest(s) who are willing) the sacrament of Penance can be resumed, provided that the following procedures are observed:

1. The floor of the church should have tape marks designating where penitents are to wait in line (or designated markings in the pews), with proper social distance in all directions.

2. A volunteer observing social distancing should meet the penitents outside the church or in the vestibule and hand out masks, if they have not brought their own, and require the use of hand sanitizer. The volunteer should also remind individuals that if they have a fever or are ill, they should not enter.

3. Masks should be worn for the entire time the penitents are in the church, except for those who medically have breathing difficulties, for whom social distancing is all the more important.

4. The priest should wear a mask for the entire time he is hearing confessions.

5. In order to maintain social distancing, the traditional “confessional” is not to be used. Instead, a space or spaces in the church should be designated to celebrate the sacrament.

6. The priest’s chair should be set with a “screen” to his right or left (e.g., a suspended piece of fabric, a cloth panel, etc.) in order to provide for anonymity.

7. A chair for the penitent should be set on the other side of the “screen” for a total of at least 6 feet of distance between them. Another chair can be placed at least 6 feet in front of the priest’s chair, facing him, for those who wish to celebrate face to face.

8. An appropriate distance should be provided from those waiting to receive the sacrament, in order to maintain confidentiality of the penitents who are making their confession.

9. In giving the penance, the priest should request that the penance be fulfilled outside the church so that no penitent remains in the church after confession.

10.Afterward, the chairs and the pews used while penitents waited need to be cleaned and disinfected.

**Sacraments for the Sick and Dying**

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. 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. The actual anointing with oil cannot be delegated to someone else, a nurse or doctor, for example.

It should be remembered that “the Christian faithful who are in danger of death from any cause are to be nourished by Holy Communion in the form of Viaticum (canon 921). The ritual provides a rite for emergencies that includes Viaticum as well as Penance, Anointing and the Apostolic Pardon.

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.

+++ For even more detailed guidelines for Confession and Anointing, reference can be made to the resource prepared under the auspices of the Thomistic Institute in Washington, DC: https://thomisticinstitute.org/covid-sacraments