

## I. INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Dispensation.** All the faithful are to be reminded that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is still dispensed. The elderly and more vulnerable/high risk parishioners should be reminded that because of this, it is not a mortal sin to miss Sunday Mass, even though it is being offered, and that it is preferable that they remain home at this time.
- **Unified Approach.** To reduce the risks associated with people migrating from one parish to another, the entire diocese will follow the same protocols and all parishes will be treated as a whole with reference to opening churches, allowing public Masses and the distribution of the Eucharist. When the time comes, the entire diocese will open up together, but until then, all parishes will remain closed together.
- **Protocols.** The instructions and preparations required for resuming public Masses are not optional. Pastors are strongly encouraged to utilize their pastoral councils and other groups in the planning and preparations for recommencing with public Masses. Because of the social strife that has occurred in stores and restaurants due to the lack of cooperation on the part of some individuals, pastors need to address the need for goodwill and understanding when public worship is resumed. The four Iowa dioceses have reiterated that if there is a lack of compliance, Masses will be cancelled for the health safety of all.
- **Prohibited.** The restrictions against so-called “parking lot Masses” and “drive-thru confessions” remain in place.
- **Clergy.** Because of their heightened risk, retired priests are not to be utilized when the public celebration of Mass is allowed. This includes refraining from scheduling retired priests in a regular Mass rotation and as substitutes. In addition, active priests who are particularly anxious about celebrating Mass under these conditions will not be forced to do so, keeping in mind that following these protocols should give adequate protection for the clergy.
- **Vulnerable Persons.** Those who are 65 and older and/or have underlying medical conditions are considered to be at a high risk if they contract COVID-19. Therefore, no special Masses or communion services are to be offered for this group, as doing so would convey a mixed message about both the dispensed Mass obligation and the strong preference for such groups to remain at home.
- **Capacity.** Canon Law allows for up to four Sunday Masses to be celebrated (one on Saturday evening and three on Sunday). Given the work of Ministry 2025, it is highly advisable to refrain from anticipating overflow crowds and adding extra Masses without first assessing the actual attendance of the first two or three

weekends of public celebration. Bishop Nickless must give his permission for any priest to celebrate more than three Masses for the Sunday liturgy.

- **Mass Location.** As public masses recommence, the pastor of a cluster or a parish with multiple churches may initially celebrate Mass only in the primary church and not in the secondary church(es). This ensures that proper controls are in place and followed, and eases the pressure of acquiring supplies and training personnel in sanitizing and liturgical procedures. The schedule of Mass times for a parish in this situation may be temporarily adjusted to accommodate sanitization or other extraordinary needs.
- **Mass Times.** Mass times and schedules may be temporarily adjusted to provide the necessary time for sanitizing and disinfecting. The temporary schedule may accommodate the current need for more or less Masses, depending on the observed attendance and capacity over the first two to three weekends.
- **Weddings, Funerals, and Quinceañeras.** Once public Masses resume, weddings and funerals may be celebrated utilizing the same social distancing guidelines applicable for Sunday Mass. This is to be done within reason, still preferring that only close family and friends are present. Quinceañeras, because they are a cultural and not sacramental celebration, will remain suspended for the time.

## II. SOCIAL DISTANCING PREPARATIONS

- **Spacing.** A good social distancing guideline for the allowable number of non-family parishioners in a single pew:

Pew length:

Less than 6'	- 1 person
More than 6' and less than 12'	- 2 persons
More than 12' and less than 18'	- 3 persons
More than 18' and less than 24'	- 4 persons
More than 24' and less than 30'	- 5 persons

Parishioners must be seated at a minimum of six feet apart, and this will require only every third pew to be utilized (use one pew, skip two pews, use the next pew). Those who live together (families and couples) may sit closer together, and certain sections of pews may even be reserved for this purpose. Clergy, when applicable and possible, must also distance themselves in the sanctuary.

- **Markings.** To ease the burden on ushers and other parish volunteers, it is suggested to use painter's tape or other means to mark the six-foot increments on pews where a parishioner is allowed to sit. Marking six-foot increments on the floor in the aisles for the distribution of Holy Communion is also recommended.

- **Overflow.** If possible and deemed necessary, parish halls and/or overflow spaces may be set up with appropriately distanced chairs and a video feed of the Mass, if the sanctuary is not within direct sight of the overflow area. If there is no overflow possibility, or if the over-flow area is full, people must be turned away and pastors need to remind their parishioners of this possibility.
- **Seat Reservation.** It is left to each pastor's discretion whether or not his parish would benefit from the use of a seat reservation system or online Mass sign-up (such as [www.signupgenius.com](http://www.signupgenius.com)). It is still recommended that attendance and capacity is observed during the first two to three weekends in order to assess very specific and particular needs.
- **Tracking Attendance.** It is suggested that, if possible, some type of means of tracking who is attending Mass is compiled during this time. Some possible ways of doing this are to have ushers take attendance, utilize some type of a touchless sign-in sheet, or have parishioners notify the parish about which Mass they will attend. This is so that, in the case that a priest or parishioner discovers that they were COVID-19 positive after attending Mass, the health department can be notified as to who was around them and possibly contaminated. We recognize that this may not always be practical or possible, but we ask that you do your best.
- **Gathering and Dispersing.** Instruct parishioners to not gather and socialize inside or outside, either before or after the celebration of Mass.

### III. SANITARY PREPARATIONS

- **Cleaning Supplies.** Sufficient cleaning and sanitizing materials must be on hand and each parish needs to be responsible for acquiring these supplies. Individual parishes should assess their needs and act accordingly, networking with other parishes, schools, and local businesses to obtain cleaning products. These sanitizers and disinfectants must be certified and approved for use against COVID-19.
- **Sanitization.** Proper procedures for cleaning and sanitizing the church after each Mass are to be put in place. If a parish does not have the necessary supplies and protocols for disinfecting in place, that parish may not resume public Mass. Proper sanitation procedures can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- **Facemasks.** It is recommended that a concerted effort be initiated for parish volunteers to sew or provide facemasks for parishioners unable to obtain one. Facemasks are to be worn by all adults and children over the age of 2 in order to attend Mass, keeping in the mind the difficulties this might provoke in those with behavioral or mental disabilities. Those who do not wear facemasks cannot be allowed into the church. The presiding priest does not wear a facemask for the

celebration of Mass, but he does wear a facemask for the distribution of Holy Communion.

- **Loose Paper Materials.** The pews and entrances to the church building should contain no hymnals, papers, worship aids, or anything of the sort. This includes refraining from distributing bulletins and making this information available via parish websites and/or smartphone apps.
- **Hand Sanitizer.** Hand sanitizer, preferably in touchless dispensers, are to be provided at every church entrance and used by each parishioner as they enter.
- **Holy Water and Sacramentals.** Parishes should not be distributing anything, including sacramentals, to anyone at the current time. Therefore, holy water and the like should be removed from all fonts. If someone is seeking holy water or the blessing of other sacramentals for their personal use at home, they may bring a container of water or other objects to the church for blessing by the priest, who may do this after Mass from the sanctuary.

#### IV. THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

- **Access.** Church buildings will remain locked when there is no Mass. The doors of the church are to be open no earlier than 30 minutes prior to Mass.
- **Omissions.** All entrance, recessional, and offertory processions are all omitted. The children's Liturgy of the Word (if applicable) is omitted. The Sign of Peace is omitted. The distribution of the Precious Blood to the faithful is omitted. The collection is omitted, and collection baskets are to be placed at the entrances for loose money offerings or envelopes.
- **Assisting the Priest.** It is strongly preferred that the priest celebrate Mass without any assistance from servers, keeping a small table next to the altar for the chalice, cruets, and lavabo. Deacons may assist the priest in the celebration of Mass but are not obliged to do so, keeping in mind their likelihood of being at a high risk and the necessity of social distancing.
- **Liturgical Ministers.** There are to be no lectors, ushers, EMHCs, or other ministers that are 65 years of age or older.
- **Ushers.** During this time, ushers will be heavily relied upon to ensure that parishioners are seated according to social distancing guidelines. It is recommended that ushers seat people from the front of church to the back.
- **Music.** Music at Mass is permissible, keeping in mind that it is best to minimize the time spent in proximity to one another. In addition, droplets that spread viral contamination are propelled from the mouth while singing. If music is to be used, it should only be to a very limited degree. Only one cantor and one accompanist,

at most, are to be utilized, and no choirs. Instrumental music is allowed, but CD's and other recorded music of any kind is prohibited.

- **The Distribution of Holy Communion**

- The priest will maintain a separate paten for the Host that he will consume.
- Communion will be distributed only in one form, the Host. To limit the chance of viral contamination, the Precious Blood will not be distributed to others, including the Deacon, as it is not necessary for the validity of the Mass (as it is for the priest).
- Some type of covering (a lid, a purificator, a pall, etc.) is to be placed over the paten or ciborium holding the unconsecrated hosts on the altar. It is also recommended to use a pall to cover the chalice.
- Communion will be distributed to the faithful after the conclusion of Mass. Please see the attached *Protocol for the Distribution of Holy Communion* (Appendix, pages 6-8).
- For each minister distributing communion, parishioners receiving communion will form a single line that incorporates the six-foot social distancing with the help of the ushers.
- It is strongly suggested that communion be received only in the hand.
- Gloves are not to be worn while distributing communion. Rather, the priest, Deacon and/or EMHCs shall sanitize their hands immediately before and after the distribution of Holy Communion.
- Priests, Deacons, and EMHCs who fall within the high-risk category (over 65, underlying health conditions, etc.), should refrain from distributing communion.
- Only those who are deputized as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may, if they seek to do so, bring Holy Communion to their spouse or immediate family with whom they live. This is dealt with on a case-by-case basis and should not be advertised or in any way begin to resemble a "take-out" communion service.

## V. OTHER PARISH ACTIVITIES

- **Daily Mass.** The public celebration of daily Masses will remain suspended. Once daily Mass is resumed, it must also follow all the sanitization and social distancing protocols.
- **Adoration.** Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will remain suspended and will eventually be phased in with a set hour(s) in order to control sanitization.
- **Special Events.** Special parish events and liturgies will remain suspended.

- **Social Activities.** Any activities that precede or follow Mass or constitute a parish social gathering remain suspended.
- **Reconciliation.** Confessions will continue to be heard only by appointment.
- **Homebound and Infirm.** Communion visits to the homebound, care facilities, and hospitals will remain suspended, except in danger of death. On going efforts to phone or otherwise stay in touch with these parishioners is highly encouraged.

## VI. IN CASE OF ILLNESS

- **High-Risk Population.** Remind parishioners that if they are among those at a higher risk (65 years of age and older and/or underlying medical conditions), are caretakers of those at risk, or are not feeling well, they should not attend Mass.
- **Infirm Priests.** Any priest who is not feeling well, especially if they suspect that they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, is reason to automatically trigger a Mass cancellation, as retired priests should not be utilized as substitutes.
- **Recurrence.** If flare-ups of the virus should occur locally or regionally, the parish should be prepared to again shut down at a moment's notice and communicate this as effectively as possible to the parishioners.
- **Notice of COVID Positive contact.** If a priest or parishioner that attended Mass is later discovered to be COVID-19 positive, notify the public health authorities immediately and begin to ascertain who was at Mass and may have come into contact with the infected person.

## APPENDIX: PROTOCOL FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

- During the celebration of Mass, the priest and deacon (if present) will consume the Eucharist at the normal time, but the deacon will not consume the Precious Blood from the chalice. The distribution of communion to the faithful is then delayed, and the priest remains at the altar and carries out the purifications himself. The newly-consecrated hosts are briefly placed in the tabernacle to await the conclusion of Mass. The corporal is not folded up but remains on the altar.
- After the concluding blessing and dismissal, the priest and deacon (if present) remain in the sanctuary. The priest (and deacon) are to use hand sanitizer immediately before approaching the tabernacle. Any EMHCs assisting with the distribution of communion approach the sanctuary and sanitize their hands at the appropriate place.
- The priest (or deacon) then retrieves the newly-consecrated hosts from the tabernacle and places them on the corporal on the altar.

- Holding up a single host, the priest (repeating the words said at the end of the Communion Rite) says: *“Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.”* He then leads the people in saying: *“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”*
- The priest then gives communion to those assisting him for distribution. The priest, deacon, and EMHCs all wear a facemask during the distribution of the Eucharist. If the priest is 65 or older or wishes not to distribute Holy Communion, he remains seated in the sanctuary and awaits the return of the Eucharist so that he may place it back in the tabernacle and purify the vessels as necessary. A deacon, if present, may also do this.
- The distribution of Holy Communion occurs at the usual stations at the front of the sanctuary, particular to each parish church.
- The ushers should assist, insofar as possible, in forming a communion line that keeps a minimum of six feet between parishioners, utilizing the marks on the floor.
- As parishioner approaches to receive communion, they should form their hands into a throne to receive the Eucharist. They then step at least six feet away pull down their mask with one hand while inserting the host into their mouth with the other hand.
- The host should be placed in the hand at 90 degrees, touching the edge of the host to the hand and then allowing it to drop into the hand.
- Parishioners, upon receiving the host, should step away 6 feet, consume the host, and immediately make their way towards the nearest exit of the church, allowing the communion line to also act as a gradual and controlled release of parishioners from the church.
- The receiving of the host on the tongue is to be discouraged. However, if a parishioner nevertheless wishes to receive on the tongue, they have the Canonical right to do so. When this happens, the priest/deacon/EMHC, before recommencing with the distribution of the Eucharist, should go to the location where they had sanitized their hands (prior to the distribution of the Eucharist) and re-sanitize their hands again.
- Upon completion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest or deacon returns the remaining hosts to the tabernacle and completes any necessary purifications. The faithful, though not able to remain in the church after receiving communion, are highly encouraged to say prayers of thanksgiving in their vehicles.

- The priest, deacon, and EMHCs all sanitize their hands after the distribution of Holy Communion is finished.
- Because this mode of receiving Holy Communion is necessary but far from ideal, some brief catechesis on the Eucharist (prior to Mass, in the homily or elsewhere) is advisable to explain why this mode of reception is being utilized, but also why it is not and should not be the norm.

The following is provided to you for use on your parish website, Facebook page and other places where an explanation of the metrics utilized in the decision-making process for the recommencing of Mass may be known and understood:

**"With regard to resuming public Masses in our parishes, the Diocese of Sioux City has based and will continue to base decisions on scientific data and reliable projections. There is a number of criteria the Diocese is waiting to be met before it is deemed safe and responsible to open up churches again. This includes the downward trajectory of new COVID-19 cases reported within a 14-day period, the downward trajectory of hospital bed, intensive care, and ventilator usage, and the downward trajectory of daily death reports. In addition to these things, it is necessary to have adequate contact-tracing and a robust testing program. Achieving these conditions will indicate that it is reasonably safe to resume, with precautions, the public celebration of the Mass."**