

Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas
Safety Protocols for Resuming Public Worship in Midst of Ongoing Pandemic
May 5, 2020

Introduction:

As governmental agencies begin to ease certain restrictions placed on movement and public gatherings, the health crisis nonetheless continues to be very serious. While resuming some semblance of social, religious and economic normalcy involves some risks, the Church desires to prudently manage those risks so as to create an environment that will minimize the adverse impact of the virus on society. In a spirit of charity and with a concern for the common good, Catholics should not take unnecessary risks with their health or engage in behaviors that place the health of others at unnecessary risk. Catholics should continue to observe social distancing recommendations of six-feet between persons living in separate households, practice frequent hand washing, sanitize frequently-touched surfaces often and wear a face mask when out in public. The risks associated with COVID-19 will persist for some time and there may be an upsurge in cases at certain times of the year.

Safety Guidelines:

The following are recommendations of how Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese might begin to return to public Mass, funerals, weddings, baptisms and devotions, while at the same time observing practices that help to minimize the spread of the virus.

- **Pandemic Advisory Body:**
 - The Archdiocese has established a Pandemic Advisory Group which includes physicians and infection control specialists familiar with Catholic practices
 - The Advisory Group serves to advise the Archbishop on best practices for safely conducting religious services while minimizing the spread of the virus.

- **Continue to Dispense from the Sunday Obligation:** So that Catholics do not feel compelled to attend Mass during the ongoing pandemic, the dispensation given by the Archbishop from the obligation for Catholics to attend Sunday Mass will remain in effect until it is safe to revoke it.
 - Persons with higher vulnerability to the virus, for personal safety reasons, are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the dispensation and refrain from attending public Mass.
 - Pastors should make provisions, to the extent possible and in accord with all the prescribed safety guidelines, to make occasional pastoral visits to those who cannot or elect not to attend Mass. Visits should be limited to greeting at the door and offering Confession and Holy Communion at the door of the residence observing all the safety recommendations stated below

- **Those Who Have Symptoms:** Out of charity and concern for the welfare of others, anyone with any kind of acute symptoms, a fever or recent exposure to an infected person should not attend religious services.
- **Limit Density at Gatherings:** Local governments may impose phased-in density restrictions for gatherings. Public worship gatherings should observe the following density restrictions:
 - Parishioners should be encouraged to attend Mass at the parish in which they are registered or which they normally attend. Parish “hopping” should be avoided
 - Adhere to density restrictions imposed by local or state public health orders and if those orders are not specific, comply with the parameters listed in this section
 - Except for those who live in the same house, individuals must observe a minimum of six-foot spacing from other individuals or household groups and comply with the overall population density permitted by local health orders.
 - Only every third row of pews should be occupied to ensure safe distances
 - Lines for Holy Communion should observe six-foot distances as the line progresses, this may require only one line for Holy Communion with no side by side standing
 - Entry and departure from the worship space should use as many doors as possible and be staged to avoid congestion at doors
 - Entry and exit doors should be propped open to avoid the need for attendees to touch the door
 - Each pastor should determine how best to invite or allow limited numbers to participate at each Mass. Online signup, use of alphabetized lists or other options to prevent attempts to attend Mass beyond the permitted numbers and to avoid crowds waiting to gain entry to the church.
 - Based on local governmental density restrictions, the Archdiocese will provide parishes with examples of how to calculate the proper congregant density in a worship space, if needed. Generally, to allow the proper distancing required, church attendance should be limited to 25% of the maximum seating capacity of the church or worship space.
- **Video Tutorials:**
 - The Archdiocese will provide video tutorials on how to properly arrive at church, sanitize hands, observe the prescribed social distancing, use face masks, approach for Holy Communion, etc.
 - Pastors should link to these videos from their parish websites and encourage parishioners to study the videos in preparation for returning to church.
- **Behaviors of Those Attending:** Those who attend Masses and other religious services in parish churches should observe the following:
 - Observe the six-foot minimum distancing requirements described above
 - Purify hands with sanitizer before entering the church and as they exit

- Wear a mask, covering the mouth and nose, prior to entering the church until after leaving the church
 - Avoid shaking hands, hugging or other close contact with individuals who are not members of one's household
 - Catholics throughout the Archdiocese should watch the tutorial videos provided on the Archdiocesan and parish websites pertaining to hand sanitation practices, social distancing practices and safe way to approach Holy Communion, etc.
 - For those opting to receive Holy Communion, approach the minister only one pew at a time, always observing six-foot minimum distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household and observing the mask usage practices described in the tutorials
 - Congregational singing should be suspended to limit droplet dispersion
- **Liturgical Practices to be Observed by Ministers and Pastors:** The following practices should be employed by ministers and pastors.
 - Limit duration of Sunday Masses to 45 minutes to limit exposure time between persons
 - Ensure effective air circulation via HVAC system or by opening windows
 - Discontinue use of shared hymnals or prayer books in the church
 - Continue to refrain from placement of holy water in stoups or entry fonts
 - Continue to prohibit passing of the collection plate, providing instead a basket at entrances for attendees to drop offerings
 - The practice of the offertory procession should continue to be suspended and the elements of bread and wine should be covered with a purificator or pall while on the altar
 - Distribution of the Sacred Host should be carefully "dropped" into the cupped hand of the communicant, avoiding skin to skin contact between minister and communicant
 - Given the varying opinions within the medical and scientific community regarding transmission of the virus, we do not encourage reception of Holy Communion on the tongue at this time. However, for those wishing to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, there should be a designated minister or extraordinary minister assigned exclusively for this option at a particular station. This minister or extraordinary minister must sanitize his or her hands between communicants.
 - Continue to prohibit the reception of Holy Communion from the chalice (except for the priest)
 - Pastors should keep the number of Mass servers and other liturgical ministers to the minimum required to effectively celebrate the Liturgy
 - Music ministry should be limited to a cantor and accompanist. Congregational singing should be suspended until further notice
 - Music should be minimal enough to meet the time parameters for Mass
 - Pews and commonly touched surfaces must be sanitized between services
 - Ensure proper sanitizing of sacred vessels after each service

- Wherever possible, continue to livestream services so that those who opt not to attend in person can still participate online
 - While churches should be open outside of service times for private prayer, the number at any one time should be limited to comply with local health orders and to observe the minimum six-foot distancing. Those who enter the church should be asked to wear masks, disinfect hands upon arrival and at departure and enter via a specified regular entrance
 - Provisions should be made to sanitize the door handles, especially at the regular church entrance, and other commonly touched surfaces (bathroom fixtures, etc.), several times per day
 - The above guidelines for Sunday Mass should be adapted for daily Masses
- **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion:**
 - Ministers of Holy Communion should wear masks
 - They should sanitize hands before and after distribution and avoid touching the hands of communicants.
 - If they do accidentally touch a communicant's hand, the minister should stop and sanitize their own hands before moving on to the next communicant.
 - Procedures should be in place to have someone nearby with hand sanitizer and a method for safely setting down the Communion plate while the minister's hands are sanitized
 - Hands should always be re-sanitized after touching or removing the face mask
- **Guidelines for Adoration:**
 - Perpetual adoration chapels should remain closed
 - Pastors may opt to offer specified times for adoration in the church proper, observing all the prescribed social distancing, personal safety and occupancy density parameters listed above
- **Guidelines for the Sacrament of Reconciliation:** The following practices should be employed by confessors:
 - Continue the practice of not using reconciliation rooms
 - Ensure minimum distance of 6 feet between confessor and penitent. Screens impervious to droplet transmission should be used whenever possible.
 - "Drive by" and outdoor confessions should be used when practical, always taking steps to assure the privacy of the penitent
 - Arrangements for reconciliation should avoid the need for the penitent to have to touch door handles or other surfaces
 - Confessors and penitents should be encouraged to wear a mask over the mouth and nose