

## Archdiocesan COVID-19 Guidance

### **Introduction:**

The Archdiocese of Baltimore, its parishes, schools, staff, volunteers, parishioners and the many other communities we serve are preparing to enter the ninth month of responding to and dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful to all for your continued diligence in keeping your communities safe. Given the recent spike in cases, along with concern from many in the medical community that the next several months will be challenging, it is as important as ever that we not allow “COVID fatigue” to cause us to drop our guard. We are therefore providing this summary document as a reminder of the critical preventative measures that each parish must have in place, along with several updates on the expected standards. Thank you for all you are doing to come together as a community and work for the health and welfare of all. As noted in a recent communication, Archbishop Lori wrote, *“Let us renew our commitment to meeting the challenge of the pandemic with the spirit of innovation, charity and sacrifice that is needed to keep one another safe until a vaccine is available.”*

### **Standards and Guidance:**

Following is a summary of the key preventative measures and current guidance issued by the Archdiocese designed to minimize the risk of introducing the virus into our parishes and preventing the spread of the virus should such an introduction of the virus occur.

### **General**

#### **Capacity**

All parishes are to limit the in-person capacity of their churches and other facilities to no more than 1/3 of their normal capacity *subject to maintaining 6 feet of social distancing*, unless local jurisdictions have a more restrictive directive. At this time, only the City of Baltimore, with a maximum capacity of 25%, has a more restrictive requirement. Each parish must continue to monitor their local jurisdiction for any changes in the allowable capacity.

#### **Social Distancing**

All parishes must continue to ensure that 6 feet of social distancing is maintained at all times during any parish sponsored in-person gathering. Maintaining social distancing for all in-person gatherings needs to include considerations for seating, communion lines, classroom settings and other interactions between those attending in-person activities. Parishes are responsible to proactively and respectfully reinforce these standards with those attending in-person to ensure adherence.

#### **Masking**

All in-person participants at any parish activity, including liturgies of the Mass, over the age of five must wear a mask at all times while **indoors**. Those caring for children between the ages of

2-5 are encouraged to have those children in their care masked if at all possible. Those participating in the celebrating of the Mass, such as the celebrant, deacons, readers and others must also wear a mask at all times, except when removal of the mask is needed to clearly communicate during the celebration of Mass. For any parish events that involve in-person participants that will be held outdoors, masking is strongly recommended. However, if the nature of the event does not allow for the required 6 feet of social distancing, while outdoors, masking is required. Additionally, parishes must remain informed as to local orders that may impact the requirements for masking. At the time of issuing this document, Baltimore City is requiring masking at all times while outdoors, regardless of the available social distancing. Also Baltimore City's order **requires** masking for individuals age 2 and up.

With respect to enforcement of this requirement, individuals who refuse to wear a mask as required are to be requested to wear the mask in accordance with government orders and Archdiocesan policies. Parishes are to have extra masks at the ready should someone have not either brought a mask or the mask they brought either breaks or otherwise fails. While ensuring adherence to this guidance is essential, staff and volunteers are not to place themselves in harm's way particularly during a liturgical service should an individual refuse to comply. Rather, at the conclusion of the service, the individual should be sought out by the pastor or other designee to discuss the need to wear a mask in the future should they wish to attend Mass. As for other parish in-person activities, individuals who refuse to wear a mask following the guidelines should be excluded from the activity until such time as they conform to the requirement.

### **Sanitization**

Parishes must continue to provide for adequate sanitization to include any necessary cleaning or sanitization between uses of parish facilities. Parishes that used the long acting protectants on facility surfaces must still ensure the recommended cleanings are occurring.

### **Hand Sanitization**

Parishes are to continue to have available supplies for hand sanitization and to promote the importance of the practice of hand sanitization through signage and communications.

### **Ventilation**

Parishes are reminded to continue to ensure all heating equipment is operating properly and efficiently. As is feasible the parishes should continue to ensure adequate fresh air supply for all facilities as provided through the mechanical system as well as when appropriate and safe to allow doors and windows to be opened, even if slightly.

In previous guidance it was recommended when feasible to leave doors propped open. This was both to help with ventilation as well as to reduce the risk of common touch areas. With moving into colder weather, leaving doors propped open is not as feasible. It is recommended, particularly for arrival that the parish arrange to either have an usher or other individual man the door opening and closing for parishioners. Or if this is not possible, parishes should have parishioners opening the door themselves and then placing hand sanitizer immediately inside the doors with a reminder to sanitize one's hands.

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For dismissal, since this is typically a brief period, if it is safe to do so, it may be feasible to prop the door open for the short of time required for dismissal to take place.

### **Wellness Screening**

Parishes are to continue to provide appropriate reminders through use of signage and communications to those attending Mass that if they do not feel well, live with a family member that is experiencing COVID like symptoms, have been in close contact with a person who either has COVID or is suspected of having COVID within the past 14 days, is awaiting the results of a COVID test themselves or has otherwise been ordered to quarantine or isolate, they should be reminded not to attend Mass until such time as they and family members are feeling better or it has been more than 14 days since they were last in contact with a person presumed to have COVID.

For parish operations and in-person activities, the parish must be providing a daily wellness screening process for staff, volunteers and participants of all in-person programs.

### **Holy Water Fonts**

All holy water fonts and baptismal fonts must remain empty and dry.

### **Bulletins and Other Materials**

Parishes are permitted to resume providing hard copy bulletins and other materials subject to the following procedural considerations. All hard copy materials to be offered, whether bulletins, pamphlets, books or similar materials, are to be available to the parishioners only **after Mass**. Moreover all such materials must be placed in several accessible locations in the church where parishioners can secure their own copy of the materials. Materials are not be distributed or handed out by ushers or others. Every effort must be made to limit both the potential physical contact between individuals during this process as well as offering sufficient locations from which to obtain the materials in order to minimize the time a person must wait in line to secure their materials. Lastly, at the conclusion of each Mass or other activity all remaining materials must be secured and put away. It is critical to limit such materials lying about the church or other parish facilities to reduce the opportunity for shared materials leading to common contacts where the spread of the virus could occur.

### **Singing**

#### **Music:**

Small musical ensembles, e.g. trios or quartets (with expanded physical distancing and use of facial coverings when not singing or playing), are permitted. Consideration should be given to the size of the nave and its relationship to the loft. If the ensemble and/or cantor is located in front of the congregation, sufficient distance must be observed and/or the use of plastic barriers.

Singing by a cantor of all customary parts of the Mass (Gloria, Responsorial Psalm, Gospel acclamation etc.) may be resumed and is encouraged.

The prohibition of congregational singing at **indoor** Masses remains in effect.

Congregational singing at **outdoor** Masses is permitted, but only if the assembly wears masks.

Such musicians must be properly distanced from the congregants and others at a minimum distance of 18 feet. They must also be properly distanced from one another to ensure the musicians are neither facing one another or are front to back. Rather, those singing must be distanced at list 6 feet apart side to side and be in a straight line.

## **Gatherings**

In-person gatherings of parish sponsored ministries and groups are permitted to take place on the parish campus. All parishes must have in place the proper protocols to include wellness screening, social distancing, masking, hand sanitization, facility sanitization and all other measures in order to allow such gatherings. Parishes must also ensure adherence by participants for such gatherings. Included within those groups eligible to hold events with the consent of the parish are any affiliated programs such as Knights of Columbus, Scouting or community support groups such as AA, NA or other such sanctioned entities.

As of the date of this document, all indoor gatherings that qualify under this provision must keep the gathering sizes to a maximum of 25 participants. For purposes of this directive, there may be multiple indoor gatherings at one time on a parish campus. However the various gatherings must be isolated form one another and there must be absolutely the minimal amount of contact between such gatherings.

With respect to outdoor gatherings, those jurisdictions following the State order do not currently have any specific limitation. However social distancing and other measures must be in place. However the following jurisdictions do limit outdoor gatherings also at a maximum of 25 attendees. These jurisdiction include Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Anne Arundel County, Howard County and Harford County. The outdoor limitations in these jurisdictions does NOT apply to religious services.

## **Fundraisers**

All fundraisers that rely upon in-person attendance to an event such as bull roasts, dinners, carnivals, festivals and bazaars are to remain suspended. Fundraisers such as offering curbside pick-up including food and other merchandise is allowed so long as all social distancing, masking and sanitization is followed. Also, with respect to offering curbside pick-up of food products, parishes are responsible to verify with their location health department that such activities are permitted within the county.

## **Third Party Use of Facilities for Special Events**

Parishes are to continue to not allow their facilities to be utilized for third party rentals for special events such as wedding receptions, anniversaries, birthday parties and the like. Parishes are permitted to still allow those parties with whom they have contracts including lease agreements or license agreement to utilize their facilities. Parishes must ensure such tenants and

licensees are following all proper COVID measures to limit the possibility of introducing the virus and the spread of the virus within the facility.

### **Parish Social Events**

All parish events that are principally social in nature such as parish anniversary celebrations, staff member anniversaries, Knights of Columbus breakfasts or other meals open to the public, or other such events remain suspended.

### **In-Person Gatherings in Private Homes**

There are to be no parish sponsored in person gatherings in private homes. Individuals are certainly permitted to gather with family or others within their private homes. However, parishes are not to be sponsoring or promoting such activities. Any parish-sponsored groups that wish to meet in-person must hold all such gatherings on the parish campus.

### **Social Outreach Ministries**

Parishes are encouraged to continue with outreach to the poor and those in need. Parishes should continue to seek creative solutions to provide such ministries as food pantries, utility assistance, and the many other forms of support provided to those in need. Parishes must seek means by which to carry out these ministries while limiting as best as possible any in-person contact. Parishes are also encouraged to proceed with Christmas programs such as gifts for those in need through the Advent Giving Programs. Again, parishes need to establish new and creative means by which to collect and distribute these gifts. Parishes that have established plans and are willing to share how your parish will be providing these critical ministries while ensuring the safety of staff, volunteers and clients, please send your ideas to [Riskmanagement@archbalt.org](mailto:Riskmanagement@archbalt.org). We will happily share your solutions.

### **Blood Drives**

As the need for blood donations remain high, we do encourage parishes who are interested in hosting a blood drive to please work with your local blood banking agency. Simply ensure that the agency understands it is their role to provide all COVID safety and health protocols. Moreover if your parish is requested to provide volunteers, ensure that those volunteering are not at-risk individuals with underlying conditions that make them more susceptible to the virus. Suggest that those interested in volunteering but who have such conditions support the drive by making calls or providing other support that does not require them to attend in-person.

### **Youth Sports Programs- Parish Based**

At the present time, all parish sponsored sports programs are suspended till no sooner than January 15, 2021. Parishes are not at this time to permit such programs including but not limited to practices, workouts, tryouts or competitions.

## **Jurisdictional Orders**

While the Archdiocese will continue to carefully monitor developments at the State and County levels relative to adjustments in governmental orders related to the response to COVID-19, it is incumbent on each parish to carefully monitor this guidance as well. If you should learn of any guidance or have reason to believe updated guidance is available please share by sending to [riskmanagement@archbalt.org](mailto:riskmanagement@archbalt.org).

## **Resumption of Home Care/Eucharistic Ministry by Laity**

Currently, the laity, in addition to clergy, religious, deacons, deacon candidates and seminarians are permitted to minister through the home care ministries.

The laity must be provided a training session, preferably virtually, that addresses the necessary health, safety and sacramental considerations for this ministry. This orientation must include at a minimum instructions for the participants on the following: use of personal protection equipment by the lay ministry, use of personal protection equipment by the members of the household, standards of social distancing, hand sanitization, and other health and safety precautions designed to protect the members of the ministry as well as the individual and other family members of the home being visited. Ideally this orientation should be led by a member of the clergy, a deacon or other individual who is already involved home ministry who has first-hand familiarity with the health, safety and sacramental practices.

Other recommendations to ensure the safety of all in operating this ministry safely include the following:

Complete a health screening with the household prior to the visit via telephone. Ensure that no one in the household is positive with COVID, has symptoms of COVID or has been in close contact with someone who has been tested positive with COVID.

Laity should be limited to conducting no more than one visit daily.

Laity should limit the in-person visit to no more than 15 minutes. Laity are encouraged to reach out to the household by telephone to provide additional companionship or support.

Laity are to be familiar with the process for distributing communion on the tongue, including all prescribed hygiene practices.

Laity with underlying health concerns or other concerns that make them vulnerable to the virus should not participate in this ministry.

## **Liturgical**

### **Greeting of Parishioners/Processions**

Clergy may greet members of the assembly as they arrive at/depart from the church. However, wearing masks and physical distancing must be observed and congregating outside of the church building should not be encouraged.

Entrance/recessional processions down the center aisle are allowed. The amount of time the procession is near the congregants does not constitute close contact.

### **Personnel**

Altar servers may be employed with the permission of their parents, and only if physical distancing in the sanctuary is possible. Altar servers should continue to wear masks throughout the Mass.

### **Distribution of Holy Communion**

Parishes are strongly encouraged to distribute Holy Communion at the proper time within Mass, unless there are unique circumstances that warrant the distribution of Communion after Mass. If the decision is made to continue distributing Communion after Mass, the pastor must communicate the reasons for doing so to the Episcopal Vicar.

As a reminder, when the communicant approaches the Communion minister, he/she removes the facial covering, receives in the hand, immediately consumes the Host, and then replaces his/her mask before walking away to ensure the Host is consumed immediately out of proper respect for the sacrament.

Dismissal protocol might be necessary to prevent the assembly from congregating at the exits after Mass. It is suggested that the congregation be invited to exit the church beginning with the last pew and working toward the first pew, rather than having everyone exit at the same time.

*\*Pastors have the discretion to employ these relaxations or not, if they choose not to.*

The *Presentation of the Gifts* by the faithful continues to be suspended. The bread and wine are placed on the Credence Table in the sanctuary.

The *Sign of Peace* is omitted.