

Gatherings and Size Limitations

The Archdiocese of Baltimore previously communicated effective 12/18/2020 limitations on “gatherings” in compliance with Governor Hogan’s Health Advisory limiting all indoor “gatherings”, other than for “religious services”, including liturgies and sacraments, to no more than 10 participants. Given recent announcements from the State and numerous City and County jurisdictions relative to COVID-19 restrictions, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is revising guidance regarding acceptable “gatherings” as follows.

For purposes of this guidance, gatherings have been divided into three categories: “Religious Services”, “Religious Gatherings” and “Social Gatherings”.

“Religious Services”

Parishes are to continue to hold in person religious services including liturgies, sacraments and other religious rites. These religious services are subject to continuing the practice of social distancing at 6 ft. for those individuals who are not from the same household, masking and sanitization. Subject to providing the prescribed social distancing, such in-person services are not to exceed 1/3 of the facility’s capacity, unless the particular jurisdiction has a lower percentage for the maximum capacity. This capacity is based upon the established capacity for fire code occupancy. Parishes are also encourage to periodically remind parishioners if they are feeling well or believe they have been exposed to a COVID positive individual, they should not attend church services in person.

For parishes that the 1/3 capacity is creating an inability to serve all parishioners, please reach out to your Vicar Bishop’s office to discussion alternatives to meet the needs of your parish.

“Religious Gatherings”

In addition to religious services, all parishes may resume or expand in-person “religious gatherings”. For purposes of this guidance “religious gatherings” include but is not limited to faith formation, prayer groups, Bible studies, AA and other self-help groups, organized youth activities, scouting and other activities as deemed appropriate by the parish as qualifying as “religious gatherings”. While an activity Resumption of the in-person “religious gatherings” permitted under this provision are subject to the following protocols being in place at the parish:

1. The parish is responsible to ensure that all State and County or City restrictions applicable in their jurisdiction are carefully monitored and adhered to by the parish.
2. The parish must ensure that all gatherings provide adequate space to allow attendees that are not from the same household to be socially distanced at a minimum of 6 ft.
3. As with religious services, such in-person religious gatherings are not to exceed 1/3 of the facility’s total capacity.
4. The parish is to maintain strict adherence to facial coverings and masking requirements.
5. The parish is to have in place all protocols to permit proper hand sanitization.
6. The parish is to have in place all protocols to ensure proper and sufficient cleaning and sanitization as prescribed by the CDC and other health officials.

7. The parish is to have in place a wellness screening process that ensures all attendees are subject to sufficient screening to ensure no one is symptomatic with COVID like symptoms or that no attendee has been exposed to COVID-19.
8. The parish is to maintain a list of attendees for contact tracing, if need unless the nature of the “religious gathering” requires confidentiality.
9. The parish must have in place a process for timely notification to the Office of Risk Management of any concerns regarding an incident of possible exposure. The parish must also have designated staff assigned to coordinate the contact tracing efforts and to ensure timely and proper communications with those impacted by a possible or actual exposure incident.
10. All applicable guidance related to COVID guidance such as limitations on congregational singing, providing of singing at “religious gatherings” must be followed.

“Social Gatherings”

Purely social gatherings at the parish are to be discouraged. However, should a parish elect to allow such “social gatherings” these in-person gatherings must be restricted to the number of attendees as permitted under current State and local orders. Most jurisdictions currently are limiting such gatherings to 10 individuals indoor and 25 individuals outdoor. Again, it is the responsibility of the parish to remain current on what number of attendees their jurisdiction permits. It is also extremely important that parish carefully evaluate proposed gatherings to determine if they are in fact “religious gatherings” verses a social gatherings. Under many of the County Executive Orders “social gatherings” includes but is not limited to family gatherings, parties, cookouts, parades, **festivals**, conventions, **fundraisers**, **flea markets**, **yard sales**, and other gatherings that are not associated with operating or patronizing a business that sells merchandise from a location with a posted Maximum Occupancy. Keeping these guidelines in mind, parishes are encouraged to reserve the designation of a “religious gatherings” to those gatherings that are truly supporting the evangelization mission of the parish.