



ARCHDIOCESE  
*of* BALTIMORE

# COVID-19 PROTOCOLS SUMMATION

COVID-19 Task Force Committee  
As of 5/28/2021

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## **Introduction**

In response to the global pandemic, the Archdiocese of Baltimore formed a Task Force committee in March of 2020. The committee is made up of senior leadership from the Archbishop's Offices, Vicar Offices, Clergy Personnel, Human Resources, Communications, Associated Catholic Charities, and Risk Management and has been meeting regularly since the beginning of the pandemic. In an effort to communicate the latest guidance, the Office of Communications has been providing regular, sometimes, daily updates as to established guidance to assist our parishes and schools in navigating through the best course of action to be taken in order to protect the health and wellness of our parish and school communities.

In an effort to streamline the communication process, the Task Force is introducing this summation resource document which contains a collection of all current guidance. This document will be updated regularly and updates will be clearly noted with revision dates for ease of use. This will enable locations to know they are following the most current guidance. As new topics are added to the document, they will be clearly noted as "Newly Added" on the table of content. As topics are revised, they will be clearly noted as "Revised" along with the date of revision. The goal of this document is to provide a single source of information to all parishes and schools. As a result, the objective is to bring all parishes and schools into better alignment with all locations following the same standard guidance.

Any questions regarding the information provided or suggested topics to be added, should be forwarded to the Office of Risk Management at [riskmanagement@archbalt.org](mailto:riskmanagement@archbalt.org).

### **After Mass Registrations and Solicitations**

A parish may resume holding after-mass registrations and solicitations. Activities typically include the sale of raffle tickets, giving gifts such as for Mother's Day, or hosting registrations for various parish programs. Resumption of such activities is subject to ensuring the following safety precautions are in place:

- Any tables or distribution/collection locations are sufficiently away from all exists so as not to interfere with or slow the exiting process;
- Multiple locations are required for parishioners to approach for the "transaction" so as to minimize folks being held in a queue;
- Prescribed social distancing in affect at the time must be followed for those waiting in line; and
- Table, pens, and other supplies are regularly cleaned.

### **Altar Servers**

Altar servers may be employed with the permission of their parents and only if prescribed social distancing in the sanctuary is possible. Altar servers who are not vaccinated must continue to wear masks throughout the duration of the Mass, as well as those serving in parishes in jurisdictions where masking orders are still in place.

### **American Sign Language**

For parishes that would normally offer an ASL-interpreted Mass, this practice can be resumed. This will depend on the availability and willingness of the ASL interpreter to attend Mass in person. If it is not possible to offer an ASL-interpreted Mass in person, parishes should consider having an ASL interpreter for its online Mass. It is a current best practice to offer such online interpreted Masses using a "picture-in-picture" format. Facial expression is an integral part of ASL. Therefore, the ASL interpreter should not use a face covering when interpreting but should use it at all other times if the ASL interpreter is not vaccinated or is required by local order. It is also noted that under the current order, if applicable, there is an exemption that allows for the removal of the mask to enable one to communicate with others that facial expression and reading of lips provides assistance. The interpreter should be placed in a position so that the movement of the hands and facial expression can be clearly seen, but not interfere with the congregation focusing on the liturgy.

With proper sanitizing hand-held assistive listening devices for the Hard of Hearing after each use, parishes can again make them available to congregants.

### **Anointing of the Sick/Viaticum**

Priests have a sacred calling to be attentive to the needs of the sick and dying. During this Coronavirus pandemic, this must be done in an especially thoughtful, safe, and prayerful manner. Having received best practice recommendations of health care professionals, the Archdiocese has established the following directives for priests providing sacramental ministry during this time of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

Clergy with underlying health conditions continue to be reminded to safeguard their own health. However, if in the judgment of the clergy member they wish to proceed with visiting the sick and

homebound, even in light of their own underlying health considerations, it is up to the individual judgment of the clergy member as to whether or not to resume sick and homebound care ministries.

These restrictions follow the healthcare guidance that indicate younger, healthier individuals are at a much-diminished risk of contracting a serious case of COVID-19. Consideration of the current living situation of young priests should also be a factor before a decision is made for an individual priest to engage in this ministry.

#### *For Those Suffering from COVID-19*

1. If Anointing of the Sick is performed in a hospital or healthcare facility, the guidelines for protective measures, including garments, prevail. Please ask the facility for any written guidance in advance, if available.
2. At this time, if persons with COVID-19 are outside a hospital or healthcare facility, remote pastoral care, through the telephone, etc. should be given UNLESS the person is in danger of death. If a priest visits this person, the following protocol is to be followed:
  - i. If available, latex gloves should be worn unless the patient or priest has an allergic sensitivity to latex;
  - ii. Additionally, if available, protective eyewear (a pair of glasses will suffice) should be worn;
  - iii. Eyeglasses or goggles or eye protectors can be re-used BUT MUST be cleaned immediately after each visit with Lysol/Clorox wipes or washed with soap and water; and
  - iv. If possible, the patient should also wear a facial covering to prevent the possible spread of disease.
3. The anointing must be done with a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball that is to be burned or buried after use and may be applied to any part of the body.
4. If the priest uses his gloved hand, the glove is to be burned or buried after the visit.
5. If Holy Communion is given, it is only to be distributed in the hand.
6. Maintain physical distance (3 feet) with everyone in the room, except the patient who should wear a facial covering, if possible.
7. Avoid physical contact while offering comfort to the patient.
8. Immediately after the visit, the priest must follow applicable guidance regarding whether he must self-quarantine. This assessment must include if the priest is vaccinated, the length of the visit and the ability to maintain social distancing during the visit.

#### *For Those NOT Suffering From COVID-19*

The following directives apply for clergy providing Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound:

1. The priest should prudently weigh the risks to himself, the community, the patient and his/ her family before proceeding. This includes evaluating the vaccination status of the priest as well as the verification of when the individual to be visited was last tested to rule out COVID.

2. If the anointing is provided in a hospital or other healthcare facility, the guidelines for protective measures, including the wearing of garments, prevail. Please ask the facility for any written guidance in advance, if available.
3. If not provided in a hospital or other healthcare facility:
  - i. If available, latex gloves should be worn unless the patient or priest has an allergic sensitivity to latex
  - ii. Protective eyewear (a pair of glasses will suffice) should be worn
  - iii. Eyeglasses, goggles, or eye protectors can be re-used BUT MUST be cleaned immediately after each visit with Lysol/Clorox wipes or washed with soap and water

If the sacramental ministry is provided in a home, priests should:

- i. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer upon entering the home;
- ii. Avoid any physical contact with the person or family during the visit;
- iii. Use hand sanitizer again before distributing Communion;
- iv. Strongly encourage the patient to receive Communion in the hand, not the tongue;
- v. Maintain physical distance (minimum of 3 feet) with everyone in the room, except the patient; and
- vi. Avoid physical contact while offering comfort to the patient.

### **Automatic Holy Water Dispensers**

See Holy Water

### **Baptism**

The Sacrament of Baptism is allowed outside of Mass for one or more families. The directives for physical distancing and restrictions on the number of people gathered must be observed. The following additional guidelines are to be followed:

- Those who have not been vaccinated, including children between the ages of 2 to 12 are to be strongly encouraged to wear facial coverings. Children under the age of 2 are not required to be masked. The minister, if not vaccinated, must wear a mask. For ministers fully vaccinated wearing a mask is optional.
- The floor around the baptismal font should be marked with removable tape so that people are standing at least 3 feet apart during the Sacrament.
- Only freshwater is to be used for each Baptism. In addition, the baptismal font should be fitted with a glass or metal bowl so that the blessed water may be removed afterward.
- For Baptisms with more than one infant from different families: when pouring the blessed water over the infant's head, the blessed water should not be poured into the vessel from which the water was taken.
- A shell or other vessel is to be used to pour water over the infant's head instead of the minister's hand.
- For anointing, a cotton ball or swab is no longer required. However, if minister or parents prefer the use of a cotton ball or swab to apply the oil to the infant, so that there is no physical contact between the minister and the infant, this is permissible.
- In order to limit the handling of certain items by multiple people, the Godparent (or whomever will hold the baptismal candle) should pick up the baptismal candle and light it

from the Paschal candle. This will prevent the minister from having to hand it directly to that person.

- When the celebration concludes, the blessed water should be poured down the sacrarium, or into the ground on church property, if there is no sacrarium. The cotton or swab if used should be burned and any items used during the Baptism (the shell or vessel, baptismal font, etc.) should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized.

### **Blood Drives**

As the need for blood donations remain high, we do encourage parishes that 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 either vaccinated or at a minimum 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

### **Bulletins**

See Distribution of Printed Materials to Parishioners

### **Camps and Programs:**

Parishes are encouraged to begin planning summer programs and camps. As parishes plan these activities, it is strongly recommended plans include continued adherence to the basic principles of COVID-19 protocols including but not limited to social distancing, masking, sanitization, wellness screenings, and protocols to address incidents of possible or confirmed exposures to a COVID positive individual. Preparations that address these practices will ensure that your program can be ran safely and with the most current safety and health standards in place.

### **Capacity**

While Governor Hogan's executive order lifted capacity restrictions in houses of worship, social distancing in accordance with CDC guidance is still recommended for indoor and outdoor masses. Given the continued recommendation to provide social distancing, which is currently prescribed by the Archdiocese at a minimum of 3 feet between individuals from different households, pastors are asked to arrange seating in their churches to allow for an occupancy that is compliant with these social distancing requirements. While all jurisdictions have now lifted caps for gathering, other than the capacity as defined by the permitted capacity per fire codes or local zoning, parishes are to ensure the number of individuals in attendance is limited so as to permit the prescribed social distancing of 3 ft. between individuals from different households.

### **Child Care/Nursery**

Parishes can resume offering child care or nursery services during Mass times for young children so parents can attend Mass. Please follow CDC COVID-19 protocols. Specifically to nurseries, the guidance should include that the adults and those supervising should be vaccinated, if at all possible. They also should provide and follow protocols as prescribed for child care centers.

### **Children's Mass**

Parishes, if they haven't already may resume offering specific children's masses. We ask that you continue to follow regulations based on best safety practices, especially during the times when children are asked to gather in front of the altar or participate in an activity as a group. An option could be to mark assigned seating for those with children who will be participating so that only one section of the church will have children coming forward.

### **Cleaning**

See Sanitization

### **Collection Baskets**

Parishes are to continue to refrain from using collection baskets that must be passed between congregants. Use of collection baskets with poles and used by ushers is permitted.

Collection baskets (or any other materials) are not to be passed from one family to another. Rather stationary baskets that are easy to find or collection baskets with poles may be used for collecting donations. Stationary baskets are to be monitored by the ushers until the donations are collected and handled according to the proper protocols in place. It is recommended that the faithful make use of electronic giving to minimize the risks associated with the handling of envelopes and cash. The Archdiocesan website continues to make "universal giving" available for those wishing to make their donations to their parish online.

### **Communion**

Whether or not face coverings are required to be worn by priests and other ministers of the mass while distributing communion is to be decided upon by the pastor or parish administrator.

- Please continue to refrain from distributing The Most Precious Blood to the faithful.
- All concelebrating priests, as well as deacons assisting at the Mass, may continue receive Holy Communion at the usual time and in the usual manner. However, each must continue to have a separate chalice from the main celebrant or receive by intinction.

At this point, parishes are to have returned to distributing 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.

The following measures should be incorporated into preparations for communion:

1. At the beginning of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest or deacon should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion might do so at the appropriate time. He may add that the faithful should maintain a three-foot distance from each other as they come forward. Members of the assembly who choose not to receive must, however, enter the procession if others would have to step across them to access the aisle. They may ask for a blessing when arriving at the Communion Station, or simply wait

until the person in front of them has received and then follow that person and return to the pew.

Pastors are also encouraged to provide the following or similar announcement prior to Communion asking for the faithful's patience and understanding:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended against reception of Holy Communion on the tongue. More importantly, in response to God's command to love our brothers and sisters, and out of special concern for the vulnerable and our sacred ministers, communicants who normally receive on the tongue are respectfully asked to make a sacrifice of personal preference. Please prayerfully consider the reverent act of receiving in the hand.

Ministers of Holy Communion may not deny Communion to those who insist on receiving on the tongue. Should anyone choose to do so, the Minister of Communion must sanitize his/her hands prior to distributing Communion to the next individual.

2. The Most Precious Blood is not be distributed to the faithful.
3. A small table that is large enough to accommodate a corporal, a purification, hand sanitizer and room for the ciborium will be set near each Communion station.
4. The priest or communion minister must perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing Holy Communion.
5. The priest or communion minister must wear a facial covering as he/she distributes Communion.
6. If the celebrant is at high risk or otherwise uncomfortable distributing Communion, another priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should be asked to distribute the Eucharist.
7. The flow of the Communion procession should be considered and publicized before it begins. For instance, those receiving Communion could come forward via the center aisle but return to their seats via the side aisle.
8. The faithful who are not vaccinated, including those under the age of 12 are to be strongly encourage to wear a facial covering when coming forward to receive Communion. They will lower the covering just prior to reception of the Eucharist. 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.
9. Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves.
10. It is strongly recommended that communicants receive in the hand. If the priest or a minister of the Eucharist senses that his or her finger(s) made contact with a person's hands or mouth, he or she should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, and use hand sanitizer. This process is repeated as often as is necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not necessary, however, to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless physical contact is made.

11. At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining hosts to the tabernacle, remove the small table (if necessary), and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).
12. The Communion procession must be designed in such a way that allows individuals to remain 3 feet apart and to not pass anyone walking in the opposite direction. Consider making aisles one-way for the distribution of Communion and having everyone enter the Communion line, whether or not the individual will receive Communion. This will prevent a person from having to “step over” someone who remains in the pew.

### **Confession**

Indoor confessions have resumed. Parishes are encouraged to use confessional rooms to ensure at least 3 ft. of social distancing is maintained. While using confessional rooms, a face-to-face option as well as an anonymous option should be available.

Given the Catholic Church’s norms for Confession, the priest must be physically present to the penitent and must be able to hear the penitent without the aid of electronic devices (that is, independently of a wired phone, a mobile phone, an intercom, or other audio or video transmitting device). As always, the priest should take great care to ensure that the conversation with the penitent remains confidential.

In addition the following safeguards are to be in place:

1. Facial coverings for non-vaccinated individual should be strongly encouraged, including both the penitent and the priest.
2. It is recommended a parish staff member or a volunteer should be stationed at the entrance of the church building for indoor confessions or at the beginning of the car lane for outdoor confessions in order to provide instructions and to ensure order and appropriate privacy.
3. To allow for anonymity, “sign-ups” for Confession times should not be required.

### *Confessions in a Church*

1. Individual confessionals or reconciliation rooms must not be used, as neither allows for safe physical distancing and it requires the use of high-touch surfaces by the Penitent. It is advised that a room, such as a sacristy or church hall, be used so that access is possible without having to touch anything and privacy may be maintained.
2. A 3 foot distance between the priest and penitent must be maintained at all times.
3. The restriction as detailed in the capacity section, including the priest and staff member/volunteer, must be adhered to at all times.
4. It is advisable to set up a zone where the faithful can wait in line while maintaining a 3-foot distance from others. Floors should be marked to indicate the required distance.
5. The parish should offer the option of face-to-face and anonymous confessions for the penitents. Two chairs are to be placed 3 feet apart facing each other and a screen with a kneeler is to be placed 3 feet to the left or right of the priest.

### *Outdoor/“Drive-up” Confessions*

1. The priest may either be seated at a designated location, such as a curb, or be in his

- own car facing the opposite direction of the penitent's car, always maintaining at least 3 feet of distance from the other vehicle.
2. The limit of one person per vehicle must be observed while the Confession is taking place in order to ensure the Seal of Confession.
  3. Alternative suggestion: Penitents could wait in their cars until their turn to confess. The priest could sit inside an open doorway fitted with a makeshift screen (e.g., a sheet hanging in the doorway), with a chair for the penitent outside the door, 3 feet away. Once the penitent gets back in his/her car, the next person can approach the chair.
  4. Facial coverings are to be worn at all times by both priest and penitent, if not fully vaccinated.

### **Contact Tracing**

See Response Protocol- COVID-19

### **Dismissal Protocol**

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.

### **Dispensation**

Archbishop Lori has extended his dispensation of the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Parishes will continue to make Masses available to the faithful through internet livestream or recording, television, and radio, thereby ensuring that the faithful may maintain a spiritual connection with their local parish.

### **Distribution of Printed Materials to Parishioners:**

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 to 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 minimize the possibility of the materials being shared amongst multiple individuals.

### **Face Coverings**

See Masking

### **Faith Formation**

Parishes can resume providing in-person faith formation. All proper COVID protocols must be followed to ensure the safety of all in attendance.

### **First Communion**

Acknowledging that some First Holy Communion groups might be quite large, and recognizing that young children will not be able to practice strict physical distancing, it might not be possible to hold First Holy Communions in one Mass. It is recommended that children in need of First Holy Communion be invited to sit with their families at regular Sunday Masses. The pastor should determine how many families will be invited to a given Sunday Mass until all of the children have received First Holy Communion.

### **Food**

While there is no evidence that people can get COVID-19 from eating food, the process of bringing individuals together for gatherings that include the consumption of food can still be a source of community spread. As such the following practices must be adopted by each parish when providing food. Providing of food during meetings, activities or hosting a gathering such as a bull roast or other feed require protocols are adopted to prevent the spread of COVID. The measures include but are not limited to the following:

- No sharing utensils and or congregating around a food service area.
- Food offered at any meeting or event should be individual servings and be placed in pre-packaged boxes or bags.
- There are to be no potluck, buffet, or family-style meals offered. Avoid sharing of foods.
- If the parish or school hosts an event that includes food service, refer to CDC's COVID-19 considerations for restaurants and bars.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html>
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals not from the same household remain at least 3 feet apart when waiting in line, waiting to pick up orders or while seated.
- Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.

### **Fundraisers**

See Social Gatherings

### **Funerals**

Funerals are to follow the General Guidelines for Mass procedures. Physical greeting of friends and family at the entrance of church is permitted however all unvaccinated individuals are strongly encourage to be masked and following social distancing requirements. The casket is placed near the sanctuary prior to the start of Mass. Graveside services are to abide by current restrictions with respect to the number of people permitted to gather. Participants at graveside

services who are not vaccinated are encourage to wear facial coverings throughout the service and physical distance requirements are to be observed.

### **Gatherings**

In-person gatherings of parish-sponsored ministries and groups are permitted to take place on the parish campus and at third party venues that are allowing such gatherings. 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 these gatherings. Parishes must also ensure adherence by participants. 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.

For purposes of this guidance, there may be multiple indoor gatherings at one time on a parish campus. However, the various gatherings must be isolated from one another and no or minimal contact is required. With respect to outdoor gatherings, those jurisdictions following the State Order do not currently have any specific limitation on gathering size. Rather the State Order provides there must adequate space to allow for social distancing and ensuring other COVID mitigation measures are in place.

For purposes of parish operations, gatherings should be evaluated as falling into one of three classifications:

#### **“Religious Services”**

Parishes are urged to continue to hold in-person religious services including liturgies, sacraments, and other religious rites. If any parish is yet to return to providing in-person “religious services”, immediately contact your Vicar Bishop Office to address those circumstances preventing the resumption of in-person “religious services”. These religious services are subject to continuing the practice of social distancing at 3 ft. for those individuals who are not from the same household, masking for the unvaccinated includes those under 12 years of age and sanitization. Such in person services are subject to providing the prescribed social distancing of three feet. Parishes are also encouraged to periodically remind parishioners, if they are not feeling well or feel they have been exposed to a COVID positive individual, they should not attend church services in person.

#### **“Religious Gatherings”**

In addition to religious services, all parishes are encouraged to resume or expand in-person “religious gatherings”. For purposes of this guidance “religious gatherings” include but are 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 parishes are encouraged to resume in-person “religious gatherings” under this guidance, the following protocols are to be in place at each parish:

1. The parish is responsible to ensure that all State, County or City restrictions applicable in their jurisdiction are carefully monitored and followed 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 3 ft.
3. The parish is to continue to strongly encourage facial coverings and masking requirements while indoors for those who have not been vaccinated, unless if the jurisdiction is still requiring masking in which case masks must be worn. For outdoors, masking shall be strongly encourage for those who are not fully vaccinated, particularly if social distancing cannot be maintained.
4. The parish is to have in place all protocols to permit proper hand sanitization.
5. 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.
6. 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 such that the individual should be excluded from participation.
7. The parish is to maintain a list of attendees for contact tracing, if needed, unless the nature of the “religious gathering” requires confidentiality.
8. 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.
9. All applicable guidance related to COVID guidance such as limitations on congregational singing or the providing of singing at “religious gatherings” must be followed.

*“Social Gatherings”-*

*Carnivals, Festivals, Bingos, Roast, Banquets, Feeds and Other Related Activities*

Many parishes have inquired as to the resumption of social gatherings, such as those noted above. While it appears many County Permitting Offices are resuming the issuance of permits to allow such activities, the Archdiocese encourages each location to carefully discern if moving forward with such events is truly in the best interest of the parish or parish community. Should a parish elect to proceed with such a large gathering event, the following requirements must be met:

- All necessary permits and licenses required by the State, County and local authorities **must** be secured. It is the location’s responsibility to thoroughly investigate those permits and licenses which are required by the jurisdictions, dependent on the nature of the event.
- A copy of all required permits and licenses must be submitted to the Archdiocesan Office of Risk Management prior to the commencement of the event. Failure to submit and have these permits on file with the Office of Risk Management could adversely impact the application of insurance coverage to the location, should a claim be made against the location as a result of hosting the event.
- The location must adhere to all requirements and regulations prescribed by the various regulatory agencies to include but not limited to all food handling, preparation and serving; crowd sizes; social distancing; masking; health and sanitization standards;

securing of information for contact tracing; or any other obligations which are part of the regulations and guidance issued by such authorities to ensure the event is held safely.

- Ensure that the location is positioned through favorable contracts with vendors and suppliers to limit any financial losses should the event have to be cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19 outbreaks in the community.
- Provide to all volunteers clear instructions on measures required to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19 and a signed acknowledgment they understand the risk of potentially being exposed to and contracting COVID-19 while volunteering at the events.
- All volunteers must be trained on and understand their roles and responsibilities relative to ensuring adherence to and enforcement of all requirements and regulations prescribed in item 3 above.

It is essential that if your location is not in a position to meet and fully comply with the above requirements, your location should forego hosting such an event until our communities are further along in recovery from the pandemic.

While the above types of events are being permitted, parishes are encouraged to focus on fundraisers by offering curbside pick-up events including food and other merchandise distribution whenever possible.

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

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

### **Hand Sanitization**

See Sanitization

### **Hand Sanitization- Caution of floor damage due to hand sanitizer.**

Hand washing and sanitization is a critical component of the measures to be taken to limit the spread of the COVID-19. However, please be aware that alcohol, which is contained in nearly all hand sanitizers, can act as a solvent and dissolve floor wax, as well as in some cases cause damage to certain floors covering such as some lesser quality linoleums. Drips or splashes of the sanitizer can result in dull and discolored spots, known as “bite” marks, on waxed floors. The only way to remedy the condition is to completely strip and wax the affected floors. To avoid this problem we encourage placing rugs or other protective covering in the areas where hand sanitizer is used and asking attendees to thoroughly apply the sanitizer to their hands before moving away from the floor protection. Please also try to ensure that any floor covering or floor protection does not create any trip and fall hazards.

### **Holy Water**

Parishes are encouraged to resume use of Holy Water fonts. Hand sanitizer should be available in close proximity to the fonts to permit cleansing of the hands. Fonts are to be cleaned regularly, following proper protocols for handling of Holy Water, to ensure the cleanliness of the font.

With respect to automatic holy water dispensers, parishes are discouraged from installing these units. There is a general concern as to the perception of dispensing water that has been blessed from a machine. However, if a parish is insistent on installing such units, the units should be clearly noted as containing holy water, versus hand sanitizer.

### **Home Care/Communion Calls by Laity**

At this time, home visits of sick or shut-in parishioners should have been resumed for priests, deacons, religious and laity with the use of proper PPE for the unvaccinated and social distancing. If at all possible, ministers are urged to consider conducting the visit in an outdoor setting, such as a front porch or patio, etc. The laity must be provided a training session that addresses the necessary health, safety and sacramental considerations for this ministry. This orientation must include minimum instructions for the laity on the following:

- Use of personal protection equipment by the lay ministry as required
- Use of personal protection equipment by the members of the household as required
- 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 an individual who is already involved in home ministry and have first-hand familiarity with 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 reasonable limited as to the number of visits to be conducted on a daily basis.
- Laity should properly limit the in-person visit to the unvaccinated to no more than 15 minutes if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Laity are encouraged to reach out to the household by phone to provide additional companionship or support.
- Laity are to be familiar with the process for distributing Communion on the tongue, including all prescribed safety practices and procedures.
- Laity with underlying health concerns or other concerns that make them vulnerable to the virus, even if they have been vaccinated, should strongly consider *not* participating in this ministry at this time.

### **Home Visits.**

See Home Care/Eucharistic Ministry by Laity

### **Hygiene**

Continue implementing the preventative health measures established by the Center for Disease Control, which can be found at [www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19). Likewise, it is recommended that all

celebrants refrain from shaking hands to greet students before/after school (where applicable) and parishioners as they arrive/exit Mass. Perhaps a simple announcement prior to dismissal from Mass stating that you look forward to greeting parishioners and appreciate their understanding if you don't shake their hands when doing so, would minimize the awkwardness of this temporary measure. Forgoing the sign of peace yet shaking hundreds of hands following Mass sends a confusing message. As with all such guidelines, we want them to make sense to our people and to be justifiable.

### **Hymnals and misselettes**

Parishes may resume the use of hymnals and misselettes. Sanitization or cleaning is not required at any greater frequency than would have been performed pre-pandemic

### **Implementation of Guidance**

Over the past few weeks, the Archdiocese has issued a number of changes to our guidance. This has included significant changes including:

- the reduction of required social distancing
- resuming the sign of peace without actual person to person contact
- resumption of the presentation of the gifts
- congregational singing
- the removal of the masking requirement for those who are vaccinated

When it comes to the timing of such guidance, the Archdiocese at times must respond quickly and often on the eve of weekend masses due to the timing of the changes made by Maryland and local jurisdictional orders. Please note that the measures and timing by which the guidance is ultimately implemented is to be done at the discretion and direction of the pastor or parish administrator. The archdiocese asks that all parishes continue to move forward with efforts to reopen operations while understanding, due to parameters specific to individual parishes, changes cannot be carried through with the same timeline across all parishes.

### **In-Home Gatherings**

Parishes are permitted to resume the practice of permitting in-person gatherings in private homes.

- Parishes wishing to sponsor such activities must ensure the homeowner where the sessions will be held is fully agreeable to such use and will work to ensure reasonable measures are taken to ensure the health and safety of all in attendance.
- Parishes should provide to those hosting such events guidance as to practices to be in place to ensure the gatherings are conducted in such a manner to safeguard against the introduction and spread of the COVID virus.
- Rosters of those in attendance should be maintained for a minimum of 60 days after the activity in the event contact tracing is required.
- All other pre-pandemic requirements and guidance, particularly as it relates to Child and Youth Protection, must be adhered to and closely monitored by the parish.

### **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).

### **Liturgical Minsters**

For parishes that have not yet resumed the practice of having altar servers, lectors, and Eucharistic Ministers, you are encouraged to resume including these individuals in the celebration of mass.

### **Lord's Prayer**

The faithful are not to hold hands during the Lord's Prayer, unless they are members of the same household.

### **Mass- General Guidelines**

Following are general guidelines to assist parishes with ensuring all COVID safety protocols and practices are incorporated into the presiding over mass:

1. Entrance and exit doors are to be adequately designated and monitored. When possible and safe to do so, entrance doors are to be propped or held open before Mass, and exit doors are to be propped or held open at the end of Mass to prevent people from touching door handles, knobs or push plates.
2. Staff, ushers or other volunteers should assist with directing people to marked pews.
3. Families are to maintain 3 feet between their family and other families or individuals while on church property, including throughout the celebrations. Because of their very nature, small children might find it difficult to maintain physical distancing. Parents should consider this when deciding whether to bring them to church when physical distancing is required.
4. Seating is to be arranged such that 3 feet of distance can be maintained between members of one household and members of another.
5. Social distancing can be accomplished by allowing one pew to be left vacant in between congregants or by "checker boarding" seating within the pews.
6. It is recommended that only a schola of up to four vocalists (if they are able to be properly distanced) fulfill music ministry. Because singing expels significantly more aerosolized particles of virus than speaking, it creates a much greater risk of spreading the virus. In particular, choirs should not rehearse or sing until further notice.
7. Parishes can resume the offertory procession to include the presentation of the gifts. We recommend that sanitizer is provided on the table, where those presenting the gifts can sanitize their hands prior to picking up the gifts and delivering them to the altar. If more

- than one individual is proceeding to the altar with the gifts, those individuals should be members of the same household or maintain a safe social distance of 3 feet.
8. During the Preparation of the Altar and of the Gifts, the ciborium (a) for the faithful should be placed on a corporal away from the celebrant's paten and covered with lids, or purificators if there are no lids. Chalices for concelebrating Priests and for the Deacon(s) should be covered with palls until the reception of Communion.
  9. The faithful do not hold hands during the Lord's Prayer
  10. The admonition to "offer the sign of peace" may be given during mass, but the "sign" is to be offered **without** physical contact. It should occur verbally or with a slight wave etc.
  11. All concelebrating priests, as well as deacons assisting at the Mass, may receive Holy Communion at the usual time and in the usual manner. However, each must have a separate chalice from the main celebrant or receive by intinction.
  12. Distribution of Holy Communion from the chalice is prohibited to the faithful. For those who are gluten intolerant, special arrangements are to be made with the priest prior to Mass.
  13. The number of individuals present at Mass, including liturgical ministers, does not exceed the Archdiocese's restriction on the number of people able to be gathered: up to the number of individuals that can be accommodated while allowing 3 ft. of social distancing between individuals from different households.
  14. Those who are symptomatic or who have been exposed to the virus within 10 days are not permitted to enter the church, in accordance with national, state and local health directives. Anyone with a COVID symptoms, or anyone who does not feel well should not come to church.
  15. State guidance from the Governor's office encourages either taking temperatures at religious services or asking parishioners to do so at home. The Archdiocese is NOT requiring temperatures checks at the church but instead asks parishioners to take their temperatures at home prior to coming to church. To our knowledge, no local jurisdiction is requiring churches to take temperatures at services, but please alert the Archdiocese at [riskmanagement@archbalt.org](mailto:riskmanagement@archbalt.org) if you hear differently.
  16. Those who are at risk because of an underlying health issue or who are 60 years of age or older are strongly encouraged, for their own health, to avoid the risk of attending public celebrations of the Church, unless they have been properly vaccinated. Anyone attending assumes some personal risk. Those attending church and who have not been properly vaccinated are strongly encourage to wear a facial covering, particularly for those in age groups which are not yet eligible to be vaccinated.

## **Masking**

### *Masking Indoors*

As was communicated on May 16, 2021, the archdiocese advised the wearing of masks is no longer mandated on parish campuses in the Archdiocese of Baltimore - unless it is required by the local jurisdiction. This announcement was in response to both the guidance issued by the CDC and the Order of Governor Hogan lifting the masking requirement. It is important to stress and reinforce the announcement went onto to **strongly encourage those who are not**

**vaccinated to continue to be masked.** The Archdiocese encourages all of those who are not vaccinated to **continue to mask**. This guidance includes those individuals under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible for the vaccine. We understand enforcing those who are not vaccinated to continue to wear masks has its challenges, therefore we are relying on individuals to practice personal responsibility when choosing not to wear a mask.

With respect to enforcement of this requirement, for those age groups that are currently eligible to be vaccinated, parishes are to assume individuals will take personal responsibility for their decisions and actions. For those that are not yet eligible to be vaccinated, strong encourage is to be given remaining those individuals and their parents or guardians that masking is to be practiced. 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 are not yet eligible to be vaccinated and refuse to wear a mask following the guidelines should be excluded from the activity until such time as they conform to the requirement.

#### *Masking Outdoors*

In accordance with the recent announcement from Maryland Governor Hogan that lifts much of the requirement to wear face coverings outdoors, those parishes hosting outdoor Masses **may elect** to have attendees go **without** face coverings.

- It is still important to maintain 3 ft. of social distancing between those who are not members of the same households.
- As to require masking of the celebrant or others involved in the ministry of the Mass, it is within the discretion of the pastor as to whether masks will be required. Priests and Eucharistic ministers are encouraged, but not required, to continue to wear masks while distributing communion.
- Before establishing this new guidance, each parish should verify with their city or county authorities to ensure the jurisdiction is following the most recent masking order of the governor.
- Parish activities, other than Mass, which are held outdoors are also permitted to discontinue the wearing of masks, so long as the nature of the activity lends itself toward adhering to social distancing. Again this is subject to verifying the local jurisdiction has adopted the new order from the governor.
- For activities outdoors provided for young children, faces coverings are required. Given that children are not eligible to be vaccinated and social distancing is often difficult to maintain, masking should be continued. The one exemption would be for those activities, such as sports, that require vigorous movement. However, the mask is to be immediately replaced once the sports activity has discontinued.

#### **Music**

See Singing.

### **Presentation of Gifts**

Parishes can resume the offertory procession to include the presentation of the gifts. We recommend that sanitizer is provided on the table, where those presenting the gifts can sanitize their hands prior to picking up the gifts and delivering them to the altar. If more than one individual is proceeding to the altar with the gifts, those individuals should be members of the same household or maintain a safe social distance of 3 feet.

### **Private Prayer/Adoration**

Churches and chapels should be open for personal prayer and adoration, as they would have been prior to the pandemic, always maintaining the State restriction on the number of people to be gathered. It is not advisable to limit the hours of visitation beyond that hours which were offered prior to the pandemic, as that might cause a large number of people to gather at the same time, thus making it difficult to manage the restrictions.

If a church also has a separate chapel, the Pastor should determine which would be more appropriate to use for visitation. For example, a chapel should not be used if it is too small to maintain physical distancing or if the space has surfaces that are difficult to sanitize (carpet, cushions, etc.). The following additional guidelines are to be observed during periods of private prayer and adoration:

1. Exposition, Adoration, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament may be offered to the faithful.
2. The scheduled timeframe for exposition should be long enough (several hours) to prevent a large crowd from gathering at one time.
3. Assigned staff/volunteers should always maintain the gathering limit in the church/chapel and ensure that the faithful are seated according to physical distancing requirements.
4. Any liturgical ministers (including Priest, Deacon, altar server, organist, etc.) are to be included in the overall count of those gathered.
5. At the conclusion of Adoration, the staff member/volunteer should ensure the faithful maintain physical distancing while exiting the church. The church door should be propped/ held open so that the faithful do not need to touch the door, when safe to do so.

### **Processional**

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

### **Response Protocol- COVID-19**

Responding properly at the time a presumptive or positive COVID-19 case is presented, must continue to be a key operational consideration for all parishes. As these procedures can be confusing, we wanted to provide clarification below particularly regarding the 10-day isolation for those confirmed as having COVID, as well as the 10 days quarantine requirement for anyone who has been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID. As each parish works through these considerations, please be sure your response protocols clearly address the following:

1. For an individual who has **tested positive for COVID-19**, this individual must self-isolate for a period of no less than 10 days from the first onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic 10 days from the date of the administration of the positive test. Moreover, the individual who has tested positive must complete the period of isolation and be symptom-free for a period of 24 hours at the time of completing the self-isolation.
2. For an individual identified as having come into **close contact** with a positive COVID-19 person, that individual must complete a period of **quarantine for 10 days** from the **date of last exposure to the person diagnosed positive for COVID-19**. Receiving a negative test for COVID-19 during the period of quarantine **does not** release the individual from the period of quarantine. Additionally an exposed individual now has the options to be tested on or after the 5<sup>th</sup> day of quarantine and may return on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after last exposure if the COVID test is negative. With respect to close contacts, close is still defined as being within 6 ft. of the positive individual for a period of 15 minutes.

In accordance with the new CDC guidance with respect to those who are a close contact of a confirmed positive individual, if vaccinated the close contacts who has been exposed need not quarantine if they meet both of the following criteria:

1. The individual must have received the appropriate number of vaccinations. (Single or two depending on the vaccine administered)
2. It has been 14 days since the individual received the prescribed number of doses of the vaccine.

It is imperative to note a persons who do not meet both of the above criteria should continue to follow current [quarantine guidance](#) after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. Additionally, fully vaccinated persons who do not quarantine should still watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 14 days following an exposure. If they experience symptoms, they should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated. In addition, vaccinated persons should continue to follow **current guidance** including masking if those so elect, social distancing, hand sanitization, travel requirements and other preventative protocols practiced in their local jurisdiction.

#### *Confirmed COVID Positive Notification Protocol for Parishes*

When your parish is notified that an individual who was on your campus or who participated in a parish activity has tested positive for COVID-19, the first determination which needs to be made is whether or not the person was symptomatic or tested positive within 48 hours of having been on the parish campus or participated in the parish activity. To make this determination you need three pieces of information:

1. What was the date the person was last on campus or participated in a parish activity?
2. Did the positive individual experience any symptoms prior to be testing? If yes when did the symptoms begin?
3. If the person had no symptoms but tested positive for COVID, on what date was the test administered?

If there is less than 48 hours between the response to the first question and either question 2 or 3 then your parish needs to determine if there were any close contacts to the positive individual. If the timeframe was longer than 48 hours, no action is required.

If it is determined there was a potential exposure at your parish, the parish must work with the positive individual to determine if anyone else came into close contact with that individual. “Close contact” means coming within 6 feet of the positive person for a period of 15 minutes. If individuals are identified as close contacts, those individuals must be notified of this determination. They should be advised they should consider quarantining and if needed, seek medical advice. Once the close contact tracing is completed, if applicable, a notice letter should be sent to the impact group or if the parish is impacted, a notice should be sent to all parishioners using social media. A sample notice letter has been provided as an addendum to this document.

### **Restrooms**

The occupancy of restrooms should be limited to enable proper social distancing. Additional measures should include the following:

- At the entrance to the restrooms, the floor should be marked in 3-foot intervals, beginning 3 feet from the door.
- Place antibacterial/viral wipes in each stall.
- Post a sign on the door and in each restroom indicating the following:
  - When waiting, stand at least 3 feet apart (as indicated by floor markings)
  - Clean toilet seat with anti-bacterial wipes before and after use. Please dispose of these wipes in the trash. Do not flush them.
  - Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds prior to leaving restroom.

### **Sanitization**

The CDC has recently released revised cleaning and sanitization guidelines for facilities and parishes are encouraged to adopt the latest guidance. Per the CDC the new guidance provides the following when there are no known or suspected incidents of exposure to a confirmed COVID positive individual:

- Cleaning with products containing soap or detergent reduces germs on surfaces by removing contaminants and may also weaken or damage some of the virus particles, which decreases risk of infection from surfaces.
- When no people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 are known to have been in a space, cleaning once a day is usually enough to sufficiently remove viruses that may be on surfaces and help maintain a healthy facility.
- Disinfecting (using U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)’s List) kills any remaining germs on surfaces, which further reduces any risk of spreading infection.
- Parishes must clean more frequently or choose to disinfect (in addition to cleaning) in shared spaces if certain conditions apply that can increase the risk of infection from touching surfaces:
  - High transmission of COVID-19 in your community
  - Low number of people wearing masks
  - Infrequent handwashing
  - The space is occupied by people at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19

However, if there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the facility within the last 24 hours, parishes should clean AND disinfect the space.

### **Before cleaning and disinfecting**

- Close off areas used by the person who is sick and do not use those areas until after cleaning and disinfecting has occurred.
- Wait as long as possible (at least several hours) before you clean and disinfect.

### **While cleaning and disinfecting**

- Open doors and windows and use fans or HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) settings to increase air circulation in the area.
- Use products from EPA List according to the instructions on the product label.
- Wear a mask and gloves while cleaning and disinfecting.
- Focus on the immediate areas occupied by the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 unless they have already been cleaned and disinfected.
- Vacuum the space if needed. Use a vacuum equipped with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter and bags, if available.
  - While vacuuming, temporarily turn off in-room, window-mounted, or on-wall recirculation heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to avoid contamination of HVAC units.
  - Do NOT deactivate central HVAC systems. These systems provide better filtration capabilities and introduce outdoor air into the areas that they serve.
- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfectant products, including storing such products securely and using PPE needed for the cleaning and disinfection products.

1. **If less than 24 hours have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, clean and disinfect the space.
2. **If more than 24 hours have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, cleaning is enough. You should choose to also disinfect your facility.
3. **If more than 3 days have passed** since the person who is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in the space, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning practices) is needed.

Given the utilization of most churches, between weekend services, daily services, funerals, and other liturgical uses, it is recommended that parish adopt a schedule of cleaning daily as the parish would have prior to COVID. In addition sanitizing the church space at a minimum of two times a week. Once at the conclusion of weekend services and once prior to the commencement of weekend services. The sanitization protocol would not be required for those locations which have applied the viral protectants. Of course, if there is a known exposure at the church or other factors such as high positivity rates, then parishes should adopt a more rigorous schedule of cleaning and sanitizing. Otherwise, parishes should resume a level of cleaning consistent with that which was conducted prior to COVID.

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.

### **Scouting**

Chartered Boy Scout units, from Lions to Scouts, just as with other parish ministries, can resume in person meetings and activities subject to ensuring adherence to all COVID response protocols. See *Religious Gatherings*, for additional information.

### **Shared Space**

Historically, parishes with schools co-located on the same campus have shared space. With the numerous protocols required to ensure the safety of all, sharing of space is much more challenging and difficult. With the recent relaxation of several protocols, the Department of Catholic Schools and the Department of Evangelization are evaluating how best to coordinate the use of historically shared space for the 2021-2022 school year. As guidance is developed this section will be updated accordingly.

### **Sign of Peace**

The admonition to “offer the sign of peace” may be given during mass, but the “sign” is to be offered **without** physical contact. It should occur verbally or with a slight wave etc.

### **Singing**

With respect to parish singing and music the following guidance is to be adopted:

#### **1. Congregational Singing**

Congregational singing is permitted and congregates are free to participate in singing whether masked or unmasked. This practice can resume both indoors and outdoors.

2. Small musical ensembles, e.g. trios or quartets (with expanded physical distancing and use of facial coverings when not singing or playing) are both permitted and encouraged. 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.

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

### **Social Distancing**

In light of Maryland Governor Larry Hogan’s Executive Order (March 9, 2021) lifting capacity restrictions in houses of worship along with his most recent Order (May 12, 2021) lifting the remaining capacity restrictions for all other venues, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is taking an incremental approach to increasing the capacity of our churches. Effective immediately, **parishes may move forward with reducing social distancing requirements from 6 feet to 3 feet** between congregants from different households

All parishes must continue to ensure social distancing of 3 feet 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.

### **Social Gatherings**

See Gatherings

### **Third Party Use of Facilities**

Parishes and schools can resume, should they so choose at this time, the practice of renting parish or school facilities to third parties.

- Locations must ensure that the lessee of the facility is aware of any COVID-19 related restrictions and requirements, whether by local order, state order or parish guidance.
- The lessee must agree to comply with such guidance as part of the rental agreement.
- All requirements, including use agreements and evidence of insurance, as was required prior to the pandemic remain in force and are to be adhered to for those locations that elect to resuming offering their facilities for rent to third parties.

### **Transportation**

As parishes undertake the resumption of various activities, group transportation is a resuming need. In order to ensure the safest possible means of transportation, the following protocols are to be followed:

#### **Multi-passenger Vehicles (Buses, Special Activity Buses, Coach Buses)**

- All parish-sponsored, off-campus travel must be approved by the pastor, parish administrator or his designees. Ministries planning to travel off campus must obtain approval before entering into any contract of service with a transportation vendor or before entering a rental agreement. Parish vehicles are not to be used for group travel off of the parish campus without the required approval as well. The individual responsible for planning the trip must ensure all travel restrictions or limitations that could impact the planned trip are addressed and reviewed as needed with the pastor, parish administrator or their designee when seeking approval.
- Each passenger must complete a wellness screening before boarding the vehicle. The wellness check must verify the following:
  - The passenger is not currently experiencing any COVID like symptoms
  - The passenger has not been exposed to anyone within the past 10 days that is COVID positive or presumptive COVID positive
  - The passenger cannot be awaiting test results for a COVID test, unless such test was administered for reasons other than the individual being suspected of having

COVID or having had close contact with someone with or suspected of having COVID-19.

- Checking of each occupant's temperature with a touchless thermometer before entering the vehicle is strongly recommended.
- Hand sanitizer shall be provided as each occupant enters the vehicle. Each occupant shall be encouraged to thoroughly sanitize their hands.
- All multi-purpose specialty activity buses, buses or any other forms of transportations must be limited so as to allow for appropriate social distancing. Passengers must sit as physically distant as possible
- All occupants of the vehicle must wear face coverings.
- Windows should remain at least partially open for the duration of the trip to provide additional ventilation. If safe to do so, windows should remain partially open as well between each leg of the trip.
- Limit the use of the air conditioning and the heat when the vehicle's windows cannot remain open.
- When groups are traveling together using multiple vehicles, every effort should be made to assign individuals to travel groups that remain consistent throughout the individual trip and, if possible, throughout the series of trips.
- Ensure those vehicles that provided by transportation operators are thoroughly cleaned prior to use.
- Each parish shall provide to parents the opportunity to transport their child directly to and from the venue.
- There shall be no consumption of food while in the vehicle.
- Occupants may momentarily remove the mask to consume a drink which the passenger has brought onboard.
- During travel, stops shall be limited as much as reasonable where occupants will be exposed to others such as at rest stops, gas stations and convenience stores. Stops where all occupants can remain away from others, beyond the occupants of the vehicle, are permitted.

#### *Private Passenger Vehicles*

Parishes are allowed to resume the use of carpooling for parish events that are occurring offsite. All guidance that was in force prior to COVID-19 remain in force including the age of the driver, the verification of an approved driving record and affirmation of current auto insurance on the vehicle. In addition, until further notice, when carpooling all occupants of the vehicle must wear a mask during the duration of the travel. This guidance is in line with the Governor's order which requires the use of face coverings on public transportation. The only exemption from face coverings would apply only if all members in the vehicle are from the same household.

Additionally, guidance applicable to multi-passenger vehicles are also applicable to passenger vehicles, including but not limited to wellness screenings, ventilation, and occupancy by the same individuals and in the same seats.

#### **Travel- Out of State Travel**

As a result of the Governor lifting the COVID-19 travel restrictions effective March 12, 2021, the requirement that travel be restricted to essential travel is no longer required. Additionally, with the lifting of this restriction, it is no longer **required** that individuals quarantine upon returning from travel out of State regardless of where they are returning from (with the exception of some international travel). However, the State does still have in place a Health Advisory which **recommends** individuals returning from out of state travel should quarantine pending a negative test result.

Therefore parishes are encouraged to consider having employees tested prior to returning to work following out-of-state travel. If interested in requiring your staff or volunteers to be tested prior to returning to work and you need assistance establishing a testing protocol, please send an e-mail to [riskmanagement@archbalt.org](mailto:riskmanagement@archbalt.org) for assistance.

### **Vaccination- Church Teachings**

Pope Francis' Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has recently published a resource kit to assist parish priests, diocesan offices and health and social service agencies to help communicate with the faithful regarding COVID-19 vaccines. Please reach out to [Christian.Kendzierski@archbalt.org](mailto:Christian.Kendzierski@archbalt.org) if you are interested in obtaining a copy.

### **Vaccination Clinics- Location Guidelines**

Parishes and schools are encouraged to entertain the possibility to host a COVID vaccination clinic at the parish or school locations. Following is guidance parishes and school can proceed through for possibly establishing a vaccination clinic within the school and parish community.

#### *Step 1 Site Visit*

The National Guard has been serving as a partner throughout the state to help facilitate the establishment of local clinics and secure vaccine supply. While it is **not required** to work through them, they are especially helpful in conducting an assessment of your site to determine if your facility can appropriately accommodate a clinic.

- To apply for a site visit, complete an "Appendix I" form and submit it to the email address included on the form. It is not expected that you will have answers for all of the questions so just put down "N/A" or "Don't know yet" for questions you can't answer (*see \*below for information on identifying a medical provider prior to submitting an application*).
- You must also complete the Privacy Act form, which simply gives them permission to share your contact information with other parties.
- The National Guard then reviews all the applications they have received and selects various locations for conducting site visits so it may take some time before they follow up with you.
- Once the National Guard conducts a site visit, they will be able to determine where to conduct intake, vaccinations, waiting period and checkout (if participants will need an appointment for a second shot). They can also determine how many people your site can accommodate during a given period (e.g. 50 vaccinations an hours, etc.)

- During the site visit, determine how many volunteers you will need to assist with set up, break down and assisting participants on the day of the clinic.

### *Step 2 Identifying a Provider*

The main challenge in setting up a clinic is identifying a medical partner that can administer the vaccines at your site.

- Contact local hospitals or medical clinics, a local health department, pharmacy, or consider putting together a team of parish volunteers who are medical professionals (in the latter case you would need to order the vaccines through the National Guard).
- The Archdiocese is continuing to reach out to multiple providers who might be interested in partnering and will provide that information to you as it becomes available.
- The National Guard may also be able to help in identifying a partner.
- Your provider will also want to do a site assessment, so it might not be necessary to work with the National Guard. However, if the provider is not able to either access an adequate supply of vaccines or needs assistance in setting up the logistics for the clinic, they may prefer that you work through the National Guard in order to ensure proper logistics and to be able to quickly obtain the vaccines when needed.
- Please ask your provider to complete the attached “Right of Entry” agreement provided by the archdiocesan Office of Risk Management.
- *\*If you are able to identify a provider prior to submitting your application to the National Guard, they will likely give your application priority status, but it is not necessary to wait to submit the application if you haven’t been able to do so yet.*

### *Step 3 Setting a Date and Advertising*

- Once your site has been approved by the National Guard and/or a provider, work with your provider to schedule the clinic on a date mutually agreeable to the parish and their schedule.
- Remember that if participants will be receiving the Pfizer or Moderna\* vaccine that you will need to hold a second clinic three or four weeks later for them to receive their second vaccine.
- *\*It is not always possible to predict which vaccine will be available, but if the National Guard or provider secures the Johnson and Johnson vaccine instead (which only requires one dose), you can simply cancel the second clinic or hold another one for new participants if your provider is willing.*
- Determine with your provider what population (elderly, minority populations, non-English speakers etc. either in the parish or the surrounding neighborhood) should be served by the clinic.
- Based on the targeted population to be served, also determine with your provider how to most appropriately advertise the date of the clinic and registration information, either through bulletin announcements and parish social media, neighborhood flyers, parish phone trees, etc.

- *Once you have determined the date of the clinic and the number of vaccines that will be administered, inform your National Guard contact as soon as possible (if you are working with them) so that they can order the supply of vaccines for your provider.*

#### *Step 4 Registration of Participants*

- You will need to work with your provider to determine how participants will register for the clinic (if at all). Many providers already have an online registration process, which is the most preferable. Others may ask the parish to collect the information and send it to them. Others prefer to operate the clinic on a walk-in basis, and will collect information as people arrive. You may want to consider recruiting volunteers to contact parishioners, such as elderly or non-English speakers, who may need assistance in submitting their information for registration.
- Determine with the National Guard and/or your provider how many total appointments you will offer at the clinic. Consider maintaining a waiting list for those who are willing to come at short notice in the event extra slots are available due to no-shows or extra vaccine supply.
- You will also need to determine a process for scheduling appointments for those who have registered. Again, the provider may be willing to do this, or they might be expecting parish volunteers to do so.
- Talk with your provider about how they will determine the process for making second appointments for everyone as well if needed.

If interested or if you have additional questions, please contact Mary Ellen Russell at [mrussell@archbalt.org](mailto:mrussell@archbalt.org) or Tom Alban at [talban@archbalt.org](mailto:talban@archbalt.org) if you have questions.

#### **Vaccination Mandates**

At this time the Archdiocese is not mandating that individuals must be vaccinated in order to participate in any specific programs or ministries.

- It is requested parishes not mandate vaccinations in order to participate in ministries and other programs. However, parishes must ensure if venues being served such as hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers or the like require that those coming to the venue must be vaccinated, it is the parish's responsibility that those assigned volunteers and ministers are properly vaccinated.
- If individuals such as the sick, homebound and others specifically request that the individual making the visit or offering the support be vaccinated, the parish should then make every effort to honor that request.

#### **Ventilation**

Parishes are reminded to continue to ensure all heating and air conditioning equipment are 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. It is also important that the parish regularly service or have serviced their HVAC equipment.

### **Wedding**

As with funerals and other services, weddings are to follow the same guidance for General Guidelines for masses. The one challenging issue with weddings involves the enforcement of wearing masks. Members of the bridal party and those attending the wedding who have not been vaccinated, including those who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated should be encouraged to still wear a mask. If a bride wishes to use the center aisle for the entrance procession, 3 feet of physical distancing must be observed in regard to those seated in pews.

### **Wellness Screening**

Parishes are to continue to provide appropriate reminders through the 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. For parish operations and in-person activities, the parish must provide a daily wellness screening process for staff, volunteers and participants of all in-person programs.

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

With respect to CYO sports programs, additional guidance will be forthcoming in the near future. As for parish-sponsored teams, it is permissible for parishes to evaluate and resume sports activities. For parishes co-located with Catholic Schools, parishes are encouraged to discuss any offerings of sports programming with the school. At this time, the Archdiocese of Catholic Schools are maintaining a position of no extra-curricular activities or sports activities. Therefore, every effort should be made to strike a balance between supporting the school in its efforts to ensure the safety of students, while also providing a sufficient offering of opportunities for the other youth in the parish.

### **Addendum**

*Name of Parish*

#### **SPECIAL NOTIFICATION REGARDING COVID-19 CASE**

Dear Parishioners,

During the ongoing pandemic, our parish has worked to keep the wellbeing of our parish community at the center of all our planning and decisions. As challenging as these times are, we are committed to proper safety measures, transparent communication, and responsibly adapting to emerging circumstances. It has come to our attention that an individual in attendance at \_\_\_\_\_ has tested positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19). Our parish has reached out to this individual and understands that they

are currently in non-critical condition that they are engaging appropriate quarantining. In accordance with the safety precautions required by the parish, the individual remained socially distanced from other parishioners and was wearing a facemask while in attendance at Mass. Our parish leadership has been in communication with Archdiocesan officials to ensure that all necessary follow-up procedures are undertaken in an efficient manner. We encourage those who attended the \_\_\_\_\_, especially those who fall into a vulnerable category and are at greater risk for exposure to COVID-19, to actively monitor your health and be alert to any of the major symptoms of the virus, including, but not limited to, fever, cough, sore throat, and shortness of breath. Should any concerning symptoms appear, please do not hesitate to contact your medical professional or, if severe, call 911. Should you or a member of your household who were at the \_\_\_\_\_ receive a positive coronavirus test, please alert the parish office at \_\_\_\_\_ so that appropriate action can be taken. We recognize that this news may generate concern, anxiety, and hesitation for our parishioners, even those who may not have attended this specific Mass. We have contacted any person who may have had close contact with this individual. We encourage everyone to wisely assess their own personal situation and to make decisions that will protect the health of all involved. The coronavirus remains a significant public health risk, and each of us has a responsibility to act safely based upon the most current information on hand. Once more, please recall that the Archbishop has extended the dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. We ask that our parish community continue to hold in prayer and solidarity all those suffering with COVID-19, most particularly those within our community. Thank you.

Sincerely, Pastor \_\_\_\_\_

Cc: Archdiocese of Baltimore Office of Risk Management