



Timeline and Procedures for Resumption of Public Mass and Sacramental Life

Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma

Issued on May 6, 2020

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City, and Most Reverend David A. Konderla, Bishop of Tulsa, issue the following Timeline and Procedures for Resumption of Public Mass and Sacramental Life (“Procedures”) based upon the advice of local medical authorities, including a leading infectious disease specialist, a joint task force consisting of clergy and laity of both dioceses and members of the Presbyterial Councils of both dioceses.

Given the fluidity of the COVID-19 situation, these procedures will be changed and updated as needed. The Procedures contain requirements, suggestions and best practices. Given the various sizes and configurations of our churches, they will need to be adapted to very different environments. Pastors and parish staff will learn from each other and parishioners as these Procedures are implemented and will adjust them accordingly.

The key to implementation is common sense social distancing coupled with practicing good hygiene: washing hands often with warm water and soap, using hand sanitizer and coughing/sneezing into the inside of your elbow. Patience and a spirit of charity toward ourselves and our neighbors, particularly the vulnerable, will greatly assist in a well-ordered transition back to public Mass.

1. Timeline for the resumption of public Mass and sacramental life in accord with these procedures:

- a. Public Masses and other liturgies may resume the week of May 18; and
- b. Public Sunday Mass may resume on May 23-24, 2020;
- c. Priests with health vulnerabilities should consider using deacons or extraordinary ministers to distribute communion so that the priest can maintain social distancing at all times. If the priest’s health vulnerabilities lead him to desire to opt out of saying Mass publicly, he is directed to call the bishop or vicar general to seek alternative arrangements.

2. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains suspended for all Catholics of both dioceses.

- a. Persons with health vulnerabilities are encouraged not to attend public Mass;
- b. Persons who are sick or feel sick *must not* attend public Mass;
 - i. People with COVID-19 reported wide-ranging symptoms from mild to severe. These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. They include fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and new loss of taste or smell;
 - ii. Persons are encouraged to take their own temperature before leaving home to attend Mass and not attend public Mass if their temperature is 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or above per CDC guidelines;
- c. All other persons are encouraged to use their discretion;
- d. Parishes that live-stream Mass should continue to do so.

3. Requirements for resumption of public Mass and sacramental life

- a. Preparation for Mass
 - i. Pews should be roped off or marked to assure six feet in all directions between household groups or individuals;
 - ii. Pews that will be utilized should be sanitized by volunteers or staff before Mass and between Masses;
 - iii. Those attending Mass are encouraged to bring their own masks;
 - iv. Those attending Mass are encouraged to bring their own sanitizer and follow any instructions issued by the parish as to appropriate forms of sanitizer to avoid use of products that may damage pews;
 - v. Parishes will attempt to provide some form of sanitizer in each open pew and at the entrances to the church;
 - vi. All hymnals, missalettes, etc., should be removed from pews. Parishes should select hymns that are well-known to the community;
 - vii. Worship aids may not be printed or distributed in print form unless they are single-use for that Mass only;
 - viii. Worship aids may be distributed digitally by the parish for use on cell phones. Parishes should be aware of copyright regulations. Live-streaming music requires a separate copyright license;
 - ix. Doors should be propped open before Mass, if possible, so that people do not need to touch doors as they enter;
 - x. Those who have frequent and close contact with others (e.g., health care workers, hairdressers, food service employees), should take extreme precautions to remain physically distant from other members of the parish faith community;
 - xi. Cry rooms and nurseries will be closed;
 - xii. Holy Water fonts should remain empty, but the parish ought to maintain a way for parishioners to take Holy Water to their homes.
- b. Entering Church
 - i. It is recommended that parish staff, ushers, extraordinary ministers of holy communion, servers and volunteers who will be cleaning the church before and between Masses have their temperature checked prior to entering the church;

- ii. Ushers
 1. Ushers must wear masks to be in line with public health authorities;
 2. Ushers are tasked with ensuring that individuals/households maintain social distance as they enter church, go to Communion and leave the church;
 - iii. Households may sit together in a pew;
 - iv. Parishioners are strongly encouraged to wear masks (except for reception of Communion) to be in line with public health authorities;
 - v. Parishioners who have coughs and sneezes associated with allergies are required to wear a mask or not attend Mass out of charity for others;
 - vi. Parishioners should use wipes or spray to disinfect their pew upon entering. The Christian faithful are encouraged to bring their own form of sanitizer. They should follow any instructions issued by the parish as to appropriate forms of sanitizer;
 - vii. Parishioners should sanitize their hands before entering the church;
 - viii. Visiting other pews before, during or after Mass is prohibited.
- c. Mass
- i. Congregational singing is allowed;
 - ii. Choirs should maintain social distancing, which may mean decreasing the number in the choir at any given time;
 - iii. Priests, deacons and servers must maintain distance from each other and the congregation (except at Communion). The number of servers should be kept to a minimum to minimize movement in the sanctuary;
 - iv. The priest, deacon, seminarian or diaconate candidate should serve as the lector where possible to minimize movement of people in the church and at the ambo;
 - v. No collection will be taken during Mass. A basket/receptacle will be placed at entrances of the church for monetary offerings. Parishioners should be instructed how and encouraged to give online;
 - vi. The gifts will be placed on the altar by the priest, deacon or server. The gifts will not be brought up by procession;
 - vii. The sign of peace between parishioners will be omitted. After the priest offers Christ's peace to the people and the people respond, the Mass will continue with the Lamb of God;
 - viii. Holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is prohibited as it is not part of the Mass in the Roman rite;
 - ix. Communion
 1. Parishioners should sanitize their hands before entering the Communion line;
 2. Individuals/household units must maintain six feet distance from other individuals/household units in the Communion line;
 3. The Eucharist will be received in the form of the Precious Body only during this time;
 4. Based upon the advice of our infectious disease expert, communicants are strongly encouraged to receive the Eucharist in

the hand as a temporary measure during the pandemic and as an act of charity toward the minister of Communion and the lay faithful in the Communion line;

5. After the host is placed on the hand, the person receiving Communion should take two steps to the side before consuming the host;
 6. The priest may have special instructions for communicants who will receive on the tongue. During this temporary time, compliance with these instructions is an act of charity toward those who may fear following them in the Communion line;
 7. Priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion with health vulnerabilities should not distribute Communion, leaving that task to other priests, deacons or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion;
 8. All Communion ministers must sanitize their hands in public view immediately prior to distribution of Communion;
 9. All Communion ministers must wear a mask when distributing Communion to be in line with public health authorities;
 10. Communion ministers should attempt to avoid touching the hand of the recipient;
 11. Communion ministers must sanitize their hands after distribution.
- x. Exiting Mass
1. Doors should be propped open after Mass, if possible, so that persons attending do not touch the doors as they leave;
 2. Parishioners should use wipes or spray to disinfect their pew upon leaving. Consult parish on requirements;
 3. Ushers will dismiss parishioners by pew/household unit or other means to ensure a staggered exit of persons attending Mass;
 4. Parishioners will maintain social distancing (six feet) from other individuals/household units while exiting.

d. Miscellaneous

- i. Restrooms will remain open and have antibacterial soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, if possible;
- ii. Where possible, hand sanitizer dispensers will be placed at the doors of the church or in gathering spaces;
- iii. There will be no coffee, donuts, pancake breakfasts or other social gatherings;
- iv. There will be no receptions on church property during this time.

4. Opportunities to Attend Mass

- a. Patience and charity toward neighbor will be prime virtues as we resume public Mass. Given the need for maintaining social distance, parishes will limit attendance to no more than thirty-three (33) percent occupancy;
- b. Pastors will calculate how many people/household groups can properly social distance (six feet apart in all directions) in the church or worship space. This will be referred to as the “Social Distance Number” (SD#) NOTE: **The Social**

Distance Number (SD#) is not the same as the number of persons since household groups may sit together;

- c. Once the SD# has been reached, additional parishioners will not be allowed in the church. Pastors will be encouraged, however, to provide overflow accommodations, including outdoor spaces, where possible;
- d. Pastors are encouraged to designate one weekday Mass as being limited to only those who are over age 60 or with health vulnerabilities;
- e. Catholics are encouraged to attend daily Mass;
- f. Priests are encouraged to offer daily Mass in the main church to accommodate more attendees.