

DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS
WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS IN THE TIME OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN
As of March 17, 2020

Because of the decision to suspend public celebrations of all Masses/liturgies, below please find specific guidance on how best to proceed with celebrating the sacraments and allowing our sacred spaces to remain open for private prayer during this time. Please note separate sections for each sacrament, as well as specific and important guidance for administering the sacraments to any person who is a confirmed COVID-19 patient.

Keeping Church Buildings Open for Personal Devotion

Our churches should remain open for private prayer of the faithful and for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during a timeframe best determined by each pastor given constraints of staffing and the need to perform routine maintenance. Care should be taken to assure that church and its furnishings are sanitized regularly. Pews and shelves should be emptied of books, hymnals and papers.

Eucharist

Priests are highly encouraged to offer Mass daily, if possible, but in a non-public way. The Eucharist should be celebrated at a time other than those times a church or chapel is open for private prayer of the faithful or in a private chapel without members of the faithful, keeping in mind Canon 904: “Remembering always that in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice the work of redemption is exercised continually, priests are to celebrate frequently; indeed, daily celebration is recommended earnestly since, *even if the faithful cannot be present*, it is the act of Christ and the Church in which priests fulfill their principal function.” The presence and participation of an adult altar server and lector are permitted. Priests need not binate or trinate solely for the purpose of fulfilling scheduled Mass intentions; they can be rescheduled for the future.

Spiritual Communion via Live-Streamed Masses

Following a live-streamed, online Mass viewing is an opportunity for the faithful to remain connected to the Sacrifice of the Mass during this difficult time. Please share with your people all opportunities to experience the Mass by way of live streaming, EWTN or your own parish’s non-public liturgy. Bishop Brennan will celebrate daily Mass from the Cathedral which will be broadcast on St. Gabriel Radio at 12:05 p.m.

Baptism

All parishes in the Diocese of Columbus are asked to observe some temporary practical norms concerning the Sacrament of Baptism. At this time, Baptisms are still possible based on pastoral urgency. However, in order to limit any potential spread of the virus to a vulnerable population, only small, private family Baptisms with only immediate family and godparents attending are allowed. Use only fresh water that has been blessed for the Baptism and immediately drain it to the ground after. Family members in vulnerable populations should be encouraged to stay home.

Confession

Especially during Lent, it is important that our people experience God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Although Penance services are suspended, nevertheless, every consideration should be given to offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation to individuals. To help minimize the risk of exposure, we recommend considering the following actions should anyone be concerned about possible transmission of the Coronavirus/COVID-19:

- Temporarily move out of the confessional if it is in a tight space and provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a larger room where a confidential conversation can still be held.
- If possible, we recommend using a screen to block the air flow between the priest and penitent. The penitent should always have the option of confessing their sins anonymously.
- Attempt to keep sufficient space between the priest and penitent (Health officials recommend 6 feet).
- We advise using a chair without armrests or cleansing the armrests with a sanitizer after each use. You may also consider providing this sacrament in such a way that the penitent remains standing so to ensure proper distance while minimizing the surfaces that are touched.
- If you hear confessions from multiple penitents one after another, please ensure disinfecting wipes are available and used between each person's confession.

As a reminder, the Sacrament of Penance may NOT be celebrated virtually (i.e. video chat, phone, etc.)

Confirmations

All confirmations through April 12, 2020 are postponed and will be re-scheduled at a later date to be determined. Confirmations after that date may also need to be postponed. The Chancery office will be in touch if that is the case.

Weddings

Every effort should be made to reschedule weddings during this crisis if possible. Be aware that some counties are not issuing marriage licenses. If a civil license is available, a wedding can be celebrated with immediate family members only, keeping in mind the maximum number persons in attendance according to government directives.

Funerals

If at all possible we recommend that you schedule a memorial Mass at a time when the current restrictions are lifted. The Rite of Committal may be celebrated at the cemetery with immediate family members only, keeping in mind the call for social distancing. If a funeral Mass is celebrated, the attendees are limited to immediate family members only. We encourage you to have the family make note in the published obituary that the funeral Mass and burial are private family-only events. Please keep in mind the maximum number of persons in attendance according to government directives.

Ministering the Sacraments to the Sick and Homebound

In general, all ordinary in person visits to the sick and homebound should cease for the duration of this emergency including for administering Holy Communion. Pastoral ministers and ministers of communion to the homebound should be encouraged to contact the homebound by telephone or other means to offer comfort and support, but should not visit the sick in person whether in their homes, hospital, nursing home or other setting.

Sacramental Visits to the Seriously Ill and Dying

Non-Infected Persons:

If the visit is in a hospital environment, follow the hospital directives regarding personal care (washing hands, etc.)

- Wash hands or use a hand sanitizer once you enter the home or hospital room
- Avoid any physical contact with the person or family during the visit
- Anointing of the Sick may be done with a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball which is to be

burned or buried after use.

- Use a hand sanitizer again before distributing Communion
- If the communicant usually receives Communion on the tongue, strongly encourage him or her, for your safety as well as his / hers, to receive Communion in the hand
- Maintain social distance with everyone in the room, except the patient, so as to offer comfort without making physical contact.
- Wash or sanitize your hands after the visit.

Ministering the Sacraments to confirmed COVID-19 patients

Restrictions for who can fulfill this ministry:

- No priest in the high risk group or those over 60 years old.
- No priest with chronic illnesses, e.g. heart issues, diabetes, Crohn's, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, COPD.
- These restrictions are in place following the healthcare guidance that indicate younger, healthier individuals are at a much diminished risk of contracting a serious case of coronavirus.

Anointing of the Sick and Communion

- If this is performed in a hospital or healthcare facility, the guidelines for protective measures, including garments, prevail, including an N-95 mask. Please ask the staff to help you with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- If this is not in a hospital or healthcare facility, latex gloves should be worn unless the patient or priest has an allergic sensitivity to latex. Additionally, if available, protective eyewear (a pair of glasses will suffice) and a surgical mask should be worn.
- Be sure to wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer upon entering the home or healthcare facility and again between administering the sacrament and distributing communion.
- If the communicant usually receives Communion on the tongue, strongly encourage him or her, for your safety as well as his / hers, to receive Communion in the hand.
- The anointing may be done with a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball which is to be burned or buried after use. If the priest uses his gloved hand, the glove is to be burned or buried after the visit.
- Avoid any physical contact with the person or family during the visit, maintaining social distance (six feet) with everyone in the room, except the patient. Do not offer comfort with any physical contact.
- Wash or sanitize your hands after the visit.

R.C.I.A.

Due the suspension of all Mass and liturgies through Easter Sunday, the sacraments of initiation for catechumens and candidates in the RCIA program must be postponed until the current restrictions are lifted.

Reminder:

All parish ministries and social activities, regardless of the number of people, should not be meeting in person during this time, including Religious Education, RCIA, ministries, choir practices, parish council, and so on.