



# DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

### INTRODUCTION

Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the various restrictions and precautions that must be in place in order to ensure the health and safety of all, these instructions are intended for the celebration of the sacraments within the current medical and governmental regulations and recommendations. They are subject to change. Therefore, patience and flexibility on the part of all is required.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

**Dispensation:** All the faithful of the Diocese of Syracuse remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass and Holy Days of Obligation until further notice. However, the obligation to keep holy the Lord's Day remains. This can be fulfilled by participating in streamed Masses and abstaining from "those works and affairs which hinder the worship to be rendered to God, the joy proper to the Lord's day, or the suitable relaxation of mind and body" (can. 1247). See, *Dispensation from the Obligation to Participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*.

**Live-streamed liturgies** and not pre-recorded liturgies should continue to be offered to benefit the homebound, sick, vulnerable, and those who cannot attend Mass because of the limitations on the number of individuals allowed for public gatherings.

**Liturgical law:** All rubrics for the celebration of the sacraments are to be followed unless altered by these instructions. Moreover, the liturgical year is to be maintained and the primacy of Sunday is to be respected. For example, the readings, formularies, etc. for Sunday Mass are only to be used on Sundays, not weekdays. Furthermore, the liturgical modifications contained in these instructions are provided as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are not to be adopted as permanent alterations to the liturgy.

**Health and governmental authorities:** All directives provided by officials are to be followed.

- The **time** spent in public gatherings is to be kept to a minimum. Therefore, selections for the required ritual elements for the celebration of the sacraments should be made accordingly. For example, simple Mass setting should be sung, and brief homilies should be given. Required elements of the liturgy are never to be omitted.
- The **number of individuals** allowed to gather must be in compliance with current governmental restrictions. This applies to all sacramental gatherings mentioned below. A system of "registration" (online, by phone, etc.) should be devised by each parish so that individuals are not turned away at the door and as a safety measure to assist in reporting

names in the event of any possible exposure to COVID-19. Volunteers should assist those who have registered as they enter and exit the church.

- **Social distancing** (six feet of separation per household) is to be observed at all sacramental gatherings mentioned below. Consequently, parishes should mark one door for entry to direct the flow of traffic (attentive to fire safety codes), pews to indicate where people can sit, aisles to indicate the direction they may take, and stations to indicate where people can wait to receive Holy Communion or use the restroom. If additional spaces are used, social distancing requirements must be maintained and care taken to avoid clustering at exit doors.
- Churches are to be properly **disinfected and ventilated** before and after each individual use, not simply at the beginning or end of the period of time during which they are open. For example, the space used for confession must be appropriately disinfected after each penitent. Consult the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) recommended sanitization procedures: (1) [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces](#) and (2) [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

**Safety and hygiene** is the duty of every individual:

- Anyone attending Mass does so on their own volition.
- Those who are **sick or symptomatic** must stay home.
- Those who are **vulnerable** (i.e., sixty-five years of age or older, with underlying health conditions, with immune system deficiencies) should remain at home and should not volunteer or be asked to volunteer to fulfill liturgical ministries during this time. However, a separate seating area may be designated for them if they choose to attend.
- All ministers and members of the assembly are to **sanitize** their **hands** at home and upon entering the church. Parishes are to provide sanitizing stations. The faithful are to bring their own hand sanitizer for the reception of Holy Communion.
- Members of the assembly over the age of two are to bring their own **face masks** and wear them while they are in church for all sacramental gatherings. Ministers are not to wear face masks during the celebration of the liturgy, except when social distancing cannot be maintained (i.e., when baptizing, confirming, distributing Holy Communion, hearing confessions, and anointing the sick).
- Members of the assembly can wear **gloves**, but not for the reception of Holy Communion. Ministers are not to wear gloves during the celebration of the sacraments, except to anoint the sick. Gloves are to be removed by turning them inside-out and disposing of them in the trash. Hands should be sanitized after removal.
- **Hymnals, holy water, offertory baskets, etc.** are not to be used. Disposable worship aids and bulletins may be used.
- Competent **ushers**, who are not vulnerable, are to be trained to assist such that they are knowledgeable, calm, and welcoming.
- When **visiting the home** of a penitent, sick person, etc., meetings should take place outside whenever possible, for example, through an exterior window, on a porch, or on the lawn. When this is not possible, the one entering the home is to maintain social distancing, wear a mask, bring only what is needed (e.g., confessional stole, Oil of the Sick, etc.), sanitize hands immediately before and after the visit, and avoid touching one's face or other items (e.g., car

keys, mobile phone, car door, etc.) until hands are sanitized. Full personal protective equipment (PPE) will not be available in the home setting. In certain cases, if time permitting, it may be preferable to ask for the assistance of a priest currently assigned to the care of COVID-19 positive patients in hospitals to limit further exposure of clergy. Please see the detailed description below for the administration of the sacraments.

- Pastors/administrators must **report confirmed cases of COVID-19** of anyone who attended Mass, visited, worked /volunteered, etc. at parish. Such cases are to be reported to the local Department of Health and to the Chancellor of the Diocese, Mrs. Danielle E. Cummings.

## BAPTISM

- ❖ Individual Baptisms of infants may be celebrated, one family at a time. Among those to be included in the number of individuals permitted to gather are: the minister (priest or deacon), the one to be baptized, the godparents, the parents, and members of the immediate family.
- ❖ Baptismal fonts are to remain empty and be regularly disinfected. The water used is to be changed before each baptism and, therefore, blessed during the celebration of the Sacrament. The rite of pouring is recommended, using a vessel of water (e.g., pitcher). As always, blessed water is to be properly disposed of by pouring it into the sacrarium or directly into the ground.
- ❖ Towels and other requisites are to be fresh and properly disinfected.
- ❖ The minister is to disinfect his hands immediately before the celebration of Baptism begins and immediately before and after the post-baptismal anointing with Sacred Chrism.
- ❖ The Anointing before Baptism with the Oil of Catechumens may be omitted. In this case, the prayer “May the strength of Christ the Savior...” is said.
- ❖ The Rite of Ephphetha is to be omitted until further notice. All contact with the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears of the infant is to be avoided.

## CONFIRMATION

- ❖ Celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation by Bishop Lucia or Bishop Cunningham have resumed. Specific modifications to the celebration of the Sacrament are included in the liturgy form that is to be filled out and submitted prior to the celebration.
- ❖ When Confirmation is celebrated by a priest who has the faculty “by law” to confirm an adult he has baptized or received into full communion (R.C.I.A.), a small amount of the Sacred Chrism is to be placed in a separate vessel for each particular celebration. Any remaining Chrism in these vessels is to be absorbed with a cloth or cotton ball and burned or buried.
- ❖ Sponsors continue to place their right hand on the shoulder of the candidates at the moment of the anointing, but not for an unnecessarily prolonged period of time.
- ❖ Cotton balls (and gloves) may be used to anoint the forehead of the one to be confirmed. Or, the bishop / priest may disinfect his hands after each candidate; first wiping the Chrism from them with a cloth or cotton ball, then using hand sanitizer. The cloth or cotton ball is later burned or buried.

## EUCHARIST

- ❖ When the public celebration of Mass resumes, it may be celebrated either inside the church with the number of individuals allowed by current government regulations, maintaining social distancing, and/or in a larger space (e.g., gymnasium, parish hall, the parking lot of the church, with people remaining in their vehicles).
- ❖ The primacy of Sunday Mass is always to be maintained and respected. Nevertheless, when accommodating the desire of the faithful to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, they may be encouraged at this time to attend Mass on any day of the week.
- ❖ Before Mass is celebrated in a church or parking lot, all the necessary instructions mentioned above under “General Principles” are to be observed.
- ❖ When multiple public Masses are scheduled on the same day, enough time is to be scheduled in between each Mass to allow for traffic as well as for a thorough disinfection of surfaces and for air within the building to be refreshed through ventilation/ circulation.
- ❖ Reminder: priests may celebrate Mass no more than twice a day and three times on Sundays (c. 905 §2).
- ❖ A system of “registration” should be devised (e.g., online, by phone, etc.) so that individuals can sign up (i.e., provide their names, contact info., etc.) to attend. This will ensure that no one is turned away at the door, help to avoid any traffic issues, and serve as a safety measure to assist in reporting any possible exposure to COVID-19. Volunteers should assist those who have registered as they make their way into the church and/or to direct traffic in the parking lot.
- ❖ Preparations that must be made before Mass is celebrated in a parking lot: (1) traffic routes should be marked, (2) parking spaces that allow for social distancing should be designated (e.g, every other spot), (3) an area (“stage”) for celebrating Mass in a worthy manner should be created such that those present may participate visually, (4) a system for the amplification of sound should be attained such that those present may participate auditorily, and (5) set up for Mass following the preparations listed below (nos. 7-13).
- ❖ Preparations that must be made before Mass is celebrated in a church: (1) empty holy water stoups, (2) remove and store hymnals (projection screens or disposable worship aids may be used), (3) create a plan to clean and disinfect the church in between Masses, (4) train ushers to “direct traffic,” (5) mark pews for seating (single households may sit together) and spots for standing in line for Holy Communion, using the restroom, etc., (6) designate one entry and develop a system of welcoming those who have registered, (7) notify choirs that they are temporarily suspended (a smaller ensemble may be used provided they wear masks and are at least 12 feet apart), (8) schedule ministers (one deacon, one lector, one server) who are not vulnerable, (9) set up centrally located and secure stations for the offertory collection (the collection basket is not to be passed throughout the assembly), (10) arrange the sanctuary to allow for social distancing, (11) place the *Roman Missal* on a stand in front of the presider’s chair or on the altar, (12) place the offertory gifts on the credence table, and (13) set up a small table at each communion station with a corporal, purificator, and hand sanitizer for the distribution of Holy Communion.
- ❖ Care is to be taken in the sacristy so that social distancing is maintained, the number of people handling the vessels, vestments, etc. is to be kept to a minimum, and all vessels regularly washed

with soap and water after each use. Individuals assigned to preparing the hosts prior to Mass should disinfect their hands and wear gloves and face masks.

- ❖ Singing may continue to take place at Mass with the assistance of a musician and a cantor. Separate microphones should be used. Shared microphones are to be wiped with a sanitizing wipe before and after each use. Full choirs are suspended because of the risk that exists among them for the spread of COVID-19.
- ❖ In small gatherings for the celebration of the Eucharist that take place in a church, only the priest and deacon are to distribute Holy Communion. If a priest or deacon is vulnerable to COVID-19, another may be designated to distribute Holy Communion in his place. In large gatherings for the celebration of the Eucharist, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may assist the priest and deacon, provided they take the same precautions to avoid contact with another person (see below: “The Reception of Holy Communion”). Prior to Mass, the process for the distribution of Holy Communion should be explained to the faithful to avoid confusion.
- ❖ **Entrance Procession** – Social distancing is to be maintained with respect to one another and to the assembly. This may involve the alteration of the processional route.
- ❖ **The Introductory Rites** – may take place at the chair or at the altar, depending on where the *Roman Missal* is placed. It is recommended that the shorter options for the Penitential Act and the Gloria be selected.
- ❖ **The Liturgy of the Word** – Social distancing is to be maintained when the ministers approach and leave the ambo and when the deacon asks for the blessing from the priest. Care is to be taken when multiple people use the ambo: all avoid touching it; the lector uses the lectionary, the deacon uses the Book of the Gospels, the priest may preach from the chair. Similarly, microphones that are shared should be wiped with a sanitizing wipe before and after each use. The Homily should be shortened; it is not to be omitted. The recitation of the Apostles’ Creed is recommended for Sundays and Solemnities. The Universal Prayer should include petitions relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ **The Liturgy of the Eucharist** – The presentation of the gifts by members of the assembly is omitted. The chalice, paten, corporals, cruets, and lavabo are to be placed on the credence table. They may be brought to the altar by the priest, deacon, or a server. To avoid contact, the items may first be placed on the side of the altar by the server, prepared by the deacon or priest alone, and then collected by the server. The priest should do the lavabo alone. Hosts for the communion of the faithful are to be placed on a second corporal towards the side of the altar to avoid the priest speaking the words of the Eucharist prayer directly over them. Only the number of hosts needed for the communion of the faithful at Mass should be consecrated. Those consecrated for the sick and homebound should be placed in a separate ciborium or in individual pyxes before Mass begins. Individual chalices covered with palls may be used for those who are gluten intolerant. Otherwise, the Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the faithful at this time. The deacon may stand alongside the priest for the elevation of the chalice, since this action is brief.
- ❖ **The Communion Rite** – The non-liturgical practices of holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer and of “blessing” those who come forward for the reception of Holy Communion, but do not receive, are to be omitted. Likewise, the invitation to the faithful to exchange the sign of peace is

omitted. In order to minimize touching the consecrated Hosts, all hosts should be fractured or divided into ciboria before Mass begins, with thoroughly sanitized hands.

- The priest celebrant communicates via intinction when other priests or deacons are present. He gives communion to the deacon via intinction. Any concelebrants present come forward to communicate via intinction. The priest celebrant then consumes the remaining Precious Blood from the chalice and purifies it himself after Communion.
  - **The Reception of Holy Communion** – may take place in the following manner: (1) those distributing Holy Communion sanitize their hands before and after they themselves receive Communion and put on face masks, (2) all ministers proceed to the places prepared for the distribution of Holy Communion, (3) meanwhile, the faithful sanitize their hands (no gloves) with their own hand sanitizer and come forward at the direction of the ushers, in single file lines, 6 feet apart, to receive Holy Communion in the hand (strongly recommended; the CDC and WHO recommend against receiving on the tongue), (4) if the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion senses that their fingers may have made contact with a person's hands or mouth, he or she should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, use the purificator to wipe any particles of the Host and then use hand sanitizer before continuing, (5) after the faithful receive the Eucharist, they step aside (6 feet) to lift their mask with one hand and consume the Host with the other; those receiving on the tongue should wait until the end of the line to come forward and remove their mask only at the moment of reception, (6) communion tongs may be used for the distribution of Holy Communion, taking the precautions mentioned above concerning contact, and (7) the priest or deacon returns any remaining Hosts to the tabernacle.
  - The same protocol is to be followed as it applies to Masses celebrated in parking lots. Note: communicants are to get out of their vehicles to receive Holy Communion, wearing masks and in a way that maintains social distancing. This ensures better hand hygiene and reverence for the Eucharist. Ushers are needed to safely facilitate this process and to direct vehicles as they exit.
  - While the priest(s) and deacon consume the Eucharist, a minister may lead an Act of Spiritual Communion for those who are participating in the celebration of the Eucharist via live-stream or for those who are present, but, out of concern for their safety, will not receive Holy Communion.
- ❖ The regular cleaning of albs/vestments worn for the distribution of Holy Communion is strongly encouraged.
  - ❖ **The Concluding Rites** – The altar is cleared in the same manner that it was prepared. Any announcements made after the Prayer After Communion are kept brief. Ushers may dismiss the faithful after the Final Blessing and Dismissal to preserve social distancing.
  - ❖ The manner in which First Holy Communion is celebrated (individuals, small groups, etc.) is left to the discretion of pastors. However, even on such an occasion the Precious Blood is not to be distributed to communicants.

## **THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**

- ❖ Celebrations of Christian Initiation of Adults and Reception into Full Communion are to take place at their proper times and in the manner prescribed by the rubrics of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* unless permission/ a dispensation is sought from and granted by Bishop Lucia.
- ❖ The directives concerning the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are to be followed (see above).

## **PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

- ❖ Regular times for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance should be scheduled, taking into account the number of individuals permitted to gather.
- ❖ Reminder: For validity, the priest must be physically present to the penitent in person and must be able to hear the penitent without the aid of electronic devices. Penitents who are deaf, however, may confess their sins in writing or with the assistance of a portable electronic device.
- ❖ Disposable confession aids are permitted, but reusable or communal confession aids are prohibited. Guides for the celebration of the Rite of Penance may be posted.
- ❖ In order for social distancing to be maintained among penitents waiting to go to confession, the waiting area designated for them is to be large enough and appropriately marked.
- ❖ Confessions are should not be heard in small spaces (e.g., traditional confessionals, reconciliation rooms, etc.) unless the space has proper ventilation and is regularly sanitized. A large space that allows for social distancing, anonymity/privacy, and, above all, the maintaining of the seal of confession should be used. It may be indoors or outdoors, but it must be worthy of the celebration of the Sacrament. Those who are at the highest risk for infection are encouraged to remain in their vehicles or request a home visit by a priest.
- ❖ Any chairs, screens, etc. used must be disinfected regularly, that is, after each penitent. Consequently, penitents should remain standing or in their vehicles and not speak directly into any screen or other physical barrier that is used.
- ❖ The celebration of the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and General Absolution continues to be reserved by law to situations of danger of death and grave necessity (i.e., no opportunity to go to confession, e.g., in hospitals or nursing homes where priests are not permitted to visit patients in their rooms). Priests who encounter or may encounter these situations are to contact the Vicar for Clergy.

## **PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK AND DYING**

- ❖ Pastoral care is to continue to be provided for the sick, the homebound, and the dying.
- ❖ Communion of the Sick, Anointing of the Sick, and the combined rites of Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum may be celebrated for any person in need at the discretion of the pastor.
- ❖ Priests who are vulnerable are asked to discern carefully their ability to carry out this ministry safely. They should seek the assistance of other priests when necessary.
- ❖ Deacons who are vulnerable are not permitted to bring Holy Communion to the sick at this time.

- ❖ The lay faithful may bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, preferably to the members of their own households or those households with which they already have regular contact.
- ❖ Reminder: “A priest who administers the sacraments to someone in danger of death should not fail to impart the apostolic blessing to which a plenary indulgence is attached...” (Enchiridion of Indulgences, 1999, no. 12): *Though the holy mysteries of our redemption, may almighty God release you from all punishments in this life and in the life to come. May he open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy. R. Amen. – or – By the authority which the Apostolic See has given me, I grant you a full pardon and the remission of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit. R. Amen.*
- ❖ Reminder: The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick imparts many graces and blessings. However, it is only strictly “necessary” when a person is unable to manifest sorrow for his or her sins (e.g., the person is unconscious and so cannot make a confession), and is in need of forgiveness. Therefore, it is recommended that those who have or are suspected to have COVID-19 and are conscious celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. Those in hospitals who have or are suspected to have COVID-19 and are unconscious are being anointed by hospital priest chaplains. Those in nursing homes or in their own homes who have or are suspected to have COVID-19 and are unconscious are to be anointed by a priest who is not vulnerable and who is aware of and able to observe all necessary precautions. Priests who encounter or may encounter this situation are to contact the Vicar for Clergy.
- ❖ Reminder: For validity, the priest must be physically present to the sick person and must himself both pronounce the entirety of the sacramental formula and anoint the recipient’s body with the Oil of the Sick.
- ❖ A sick person should not be brought to the church, church offices, or rectory to be anointed.
- ❖ Steps for the celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: (1) the priest prepares a disposable card with the Rite of Anointing, a separate vessel with a small amount of the Oil of the Sick, gloves, a cotton ball, a confessional stole, a small paper bag, and hand sanitizer, (2) the priest and recipient put on face masks and sanitize their hands, (3) social distancing is maintained except at the moment of anointing, (4) the requisites for anointing are placed on a sanitized surface at a distance from the recipient; the paper bag is opened, (5) the Rite of Anointing is celebrated as normal, but with the omission of the laying-on of hands, (6) the gloves and cotton ball are used for the actual anointing (can. 1000 §2), which may be in the form of a single anointing on the forehead alone or on any other part of the body accompanied by the entire sacramental form (“Through this holy anointing...May the Lord who frees you from sin...”; can. 1000 §1; *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, no. 23), (7) the cotton ball and gloves are placed in the paper bag and later burned, along with any remaining Oil of the Sick (great care should be given to avoid cross contamination of oil stocks) (8) the Rite of Anointing is concluded, (9) the priest sanitizes his hands and departs, and (10) the priest sanitizes the items used (the vessel of oil, confessional stole) before putting them away.
- ❖ Gloves are not to be used for the celebration of Viaticum. Rather, the minister is to disinfect his hand immediately before and after giving Viaticum.

## FUNERALS

- ❖ Funerals within Mass or outside Mass may continue to take place. Parishes with a large number of funerals may wish to consider the following options:
  - Encourage families to bury their deceased loved ones as soon as possible. A private funeral Mass or the liturgy outside Mass (Mass is preferred, but whichever is more suitable is permitted) may be celebrated and a public memorial Mass scheduled for a later date. The memorial Mass could also be celebrated at a regularly scheduled daily Mass, provided that the Mass intentions are combined and fulfilled in the proper way (see below). Instead of a memorial Mass, families of the deceased could also have Masses offered at some point for the repose of the souls of their deceased loved ones.
  - If families insist on waiting to bury their deceased loved ones and there will an inordinate number of funerals when public gatherings resume, the funeral liturgy outside Mass could be celebrated for an individual deceased person and then a memorial Mass for all the deceased could be offered (similar to "Masses of remembrance" offered in November). This too would be a collective Mass intention (see below). Instead of joining a memorial Mass for all the deceased, families could also have Masses offered at some point for the repose of the souls of their deceased loved ones.
  - Funeral Masses can be celebrated within the context of daily Mass when this is not prohibited in the *Ordo*. Again, Mass intentions would have to be combined and fulfilled in the proper way (see below).
    - Mass intentions: Priests may celebrate one Mass for the intentions of several donors when: (1) the faithful knowingly and voluntarily agree to have their intentions combined (i.e., call and ask them), (2) the date, time, and place of the celebration is publicly announced (e.g. parish website / bulletin), (3) such celebrations occur no more than twice a week in any church, and (4) the celebrant retains only one offering (Congregation for the Clergy, decree *Mos iugiter*, February 22, 1991: AAS 83 (1991) 443-446; English translation in *Origins* 20/43 (April 4, 1991) 705-707).

## MATRIMONY

- ❖ The Sacrament of Matrimony may continue to be celebrated, observing all canonical requirements (dispensations/permissions, marriage preparation, delegation, etc.).
- ❖ The universal law of the Church permits the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony to take place on Sundays at the discretion of the Pastor. When considering this request, pastors are to adhere to the law permitting them to celebrate the Eucharist no more than three times on Sundays (can. 905 §2). They are also to recall that marriage between two Catholics normally takes place within Mass, unless a pastoral reason suggests that it is preferable to celebrate the marriage outside of Mass, for example, when the parties do not participate in the life of the Church (*Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 29). Finally, pastors should take into consideration the demands of parish life and the needs of their parish communities.
- ❖ The Mass of the day, not the Ritual Mass "For the Celebration of Marriage," is celebrated on those days listed in nos. 1-4 of the Table of Liturgical Days (Triduum, Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Sunday of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, Octave of Easter,

Solemnity of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Saints, All Souls' Day, etc.). Moreover, the Mass of the day is celebrated on the Sundays of Christmas Time and Ordinary Time when the parish community participates. However, one Scripture reading that explicitly speaks of marriage may be taken from The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM 144-187; cf. Lectionary for Mass, Volume IV, nos. 801-805) and the Nuptial Blessing is added.

*By mandate of Bishop Lucia  
From the Office of Liturgy  
22 May 2020  
Updated 1 March 2021*