

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY

Liturgical Updates

16 June 2021

PREAMBLE:

This document seeks to update some of the provisions for the public celebration of the Mass and other sacraments, especially given the announcement from the government in NYS about reaching the vaccination target of 70% of the population. As always, a number of sources (religious, governmental and medical) have been employed in the writing of the various Diocesan Guidelines. Account has been taken of the evolving guidelines and protocols issued by the CDC and NYS (see references below), as well as the continued improvement in the situation regarding the pandemic and the lifting of mandatory restrictions by the State (as of 15th June 2021).

USEFUL LINKS TO OFFICIAL GUIDELINES:

The latest NYS Guidelines for Houses of Worship (NOTE the Summary Guidelines have not been updated since 6th April 2021 and the Guidelines dated 9th June 2021 substantially and simply repeat earlier Guidelines with some additions here and there regarding vaccinated individuals:

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ReligiousandFuneralServicesSummaryGuidance.pdf>

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ReligiousandFuneralServicesMasterGuidance.pdf>

Also useful: The latest CDC Guidelines for cleaning facilities:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

The recent (6/15/21) announcement from the Governor of NY regarding and the vaccination target of 70%: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-most-remaining-covid-19-restrictions-be-lifted-when-70-adult-new>

HEALTH AND THE OBLIGATION TO ATTEND MASS:

A reminder that the **temporary suspension** of the **obligation** to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days was **rescinded** from the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Sunday, 6th June 2021), although this will continue to be under constant review. Keeping holy the Lord's Day is of fundamental importance for every Christian and indeed, it is constitutive of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. Of course, Catholics should continue to use their **prudential judgment** based upon religious and medical considerations as to whether or not to attend Mass.

Furthermore, it is important to note that although the **general dispensation** has been lifted, there remains a **particular dispensation** in certain circumstances (as indicated in the Bishop's recent Pastoral Letter in May):

Therefore, please assure and remind the faithful that:

- if they are sick, for example, if they are experiencing cold or flu like symptoms,
- if they are experiencing symptoms of a serious illness,
- if they are in a "vulnerable" category (the elderly, people with weakened immune systems, people with long term conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart conditions, respiratory conditions, etc.)

- if they continue to have anxiety or concerns about returning to Mass in person
- if they wish to come to Mass but find that this is not possible due to issues such as an ongoing limited capacity in a church

that they are NOT obliged to attend Sunday Mass, and, out of concern for others, ought NOT to attend, or that they have certainly fulfilled their intention to be at Mass in person.

It would be good, therefore, to maintain live-stream/recorded Masses for the many who are still not in a position to be at Mass in person.

Please note that the NYS and CDC regulations continue to maintain practices in terms of the wearing of masks, social distancing etc. for some individuals in certain circumstances (see links above, and, for example: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>)

There are no capacity restrictions, except for “large events”, defined by NYS as an indoor gathering of more than 5,000 people.

Parish leaders may decide, in the light of particular and local circumstances, to maintain restrictions or certain health protocols (see, for example, the Liturgical Updates of 17th and 19th May. Please note that these most recent Updates also lifted a number of previous restrictions, or offered the possibility of doing so)

Parish leaders may decide to return to all normal liturgical practices (that is, those in accordance with general liturgical norms and laws) such as:

Holy Communion under both kinds (obviously, there are so many considerations to be made in this case. If it is decided to reintroduce Holy Communion under both kinds, it may help to introduce this at a weekday Mass)

The placing of Holy Water in fonts (if this is done, the Holy Water should be replaced on a regular basis and the fonts cleaned)

The optional sign of peace at Mass (it is recommended that the sign of peace be given in some form that does not involve physical contact; for example, a bow or turning to those around one)

NOTE: It is **strongly** advised that such decisions be taken after due consultation and counsel.

It is certainly recommended to maintain and continue some form of prudent and sensible practice for basic hygiene and health, such as sanitizing surfaces, hand washing etc. Please note the current CDC advice on sanitizing and the distinctions made in terms of frequently touched surfaces and objects and other surfaces/objects (see link on page 1 of this document)

There are guidelines and practices still in place where it is found that a person who has come to Mass or other liturgical celebrations has tested positive for the virus.

Finally, renewed and deepest thanks to parish leaders, staff, volunteers and parishioners who have shown such amazing patience, fortitude, dedication and incredible hard work during this very difficult time.