

ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY
LITURGICAL NOTES FOR MASSES ON
THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)
(October 7, 2020)

The Purpose and Aim of this Document:

The purpose of this document is to provide both parameters and guidelines/suggestions to assist parish leaders and parish communities in planning for Christmas liturgies during these difficult times of the ongoing pandemic. There are some principles that apply to every situation, but, given the myriad of local circumstances, the guidelines and ideas given below can be applied to that local situation. There are so many unknowns, of course, but a given or known is certainly the need to plan for our Christmas liturgies.

Basic Principles and Factors:

- This document has been prepared after reviewing the various governmental, medical and liturgical guidelines, as well as after consultation with the Liturgy Offices of the upstate New York dioceses.
- An assumption that the current Diocesan Liturgical Guidelines (such as the Reopening Guidelines and various updates) will still be in effect at the time of the Christmas Season. As we know well, we are dealing with a constantly evolving situation in terms of governmental regulations and medical advice, and so the parameters and guidelines may change at any time. Furthermore, as with the celebration of Holy Week and the Triduum, the Holy See may also issue new liturgical advice or laws.
- Any parameters or guidelines/suggestions will be following current universal liturgical and canon law.
- The CDC has issued updated Guidelines for celebrating the holidays (issued on September 21, 2020).
- There is a particular concern regarding potential numbers at what is often called the “Vigil” Mass for Christmas on Christmas Eve, often celebrated at 4:00 pm.
- A reminder that the Missal provides for four Christmas Masses:
 - At the Vigil Mass (specified as: “on the evening of December 24, either before or after first Vespers of the Nativity”)
 - At the Mass During the Night
 - At the Mass at Dawn
 - At the Mass During the Day
- A desire to balance two, vital considerations. First, the need to ensure that parishioners will, if they so desire, be able to participate at Christmas Masses. Secondly, the Season of Christmas is also a wonderful opportunity for evangelization and welcome to those who

do not participate regularly in the liturgical life of the Church. It is obviously important that we will also be able accommodate this second group of people to the best of our ability.

- The number of Masses that an individual priest might celebrate over the few days of Christmas and then the weekend also needs to be considered (also see note in the next section).
- The close proximity of the weekend this year (the Sunday being the Feast of the Holy Family) furnishes scheduling issues. However, it might also yield opportunities, given the continued suspension of the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.
- How many will come? We all realize that there is no way to know how many people will choose to come for Christmas Masses. However, a good rule of thumb might be to determine the percentage of your current attendance compared to a pre-COVID Sunday attendance. That percentage of your normal Christmas Mass attendance should be close to a possible attendance figure.

Parameters and Guidelines:

Given the current threat of the Coronavirus as well as the necessary health and safety precautions that must be followed, it is highly recommended that children's liturgies, particularly pageants, do not take place. Not only is it difficult for children to maintain social distance and wear masks while speaking/singing, etc. both during rehearsals and at "performances," but it is also difficult to accommodate the gatherings that these liturgies tend to attract in terms of space and time.

Ushers/greeters/ambassadors and sanitizing teams etc.: Ushers will be essential with whatever system you have in place for helping check tickets, sign people in, help find seats, and respectfully turn people from the doors. Given the need to sanitize after each Mass, this will affect the schedule of Masses.

As with the past few years, in certain and exceptional circumstances it may be possible to celebrate a Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve before 4:00 pm. **Permission must be obtained from the Bishop's Office for each case.**

Diocesan Guidelines regarding singing or the use of choirs remains in force (cf. Liturgical Updates issued on September 28, 2020).

Given that the Season of Advent is one of preparation, consideration should also be given in planning to encourage the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Again, the current Diocesan Liturgical Guidelines and Updates regarding this sacrament remain in force. If the space and other factors allows, some form of communal celebration may be possible, provided that the usual requirements (masks, social distancing, sanitizing etc.) can be maintained.

Acknowledging the exceptional situation in which we find ourselves this year, the Bishop gives a general permission for a priest to celebrate up to 6 Masses for Christmas where this is an absolute necessity (up to 3 on Christmas Eve and up to 3 on Christmas Day).

Suggestions and Ideas:

These are based on input from various parishes leaders in the Diocese (thank you for sharing your best practices and ideas!)

Use the many ways available to communicate with your parishioners about Christmas Mass arrangements (times, use of tickets/reservations etc.). Examples include: phone tree system, Flocknote (this has a sign-up function), website, apps, Christmas letters, advertising, voicemail message on the parish phone system.

Whatever form of media is employed, it would be prudent to include information or a reminder about the various requirements (such as face masks, social distancing etc.)

Begin the process of planning NOW and aim to be communicating with parishioners by the First Sunday of Advent.

Encourage regular Mass goers to consider attending a Mass other than the highly popular 4:00 pm (or similar time) Vigil.

Add Masses (perhaps utilizing other priests, where possible).

Use an alternative location (parish hall, arena, etc.).

Use technology to show Mass in a satellite location where people could still be able to receive Holy Communion.

A possibility of offering other Christmas services or liturgies rather than the Mass at certain times, given that the Sunday/Holy Day obligation continues to be suspended. Note that according to liturgical law, a form of communion service should not be celebrated in a church if Mass is also being offered on the same day in that place.

Have tickets or a reservation system (consider this for Christmas especially if you are not using the ticket or reservation system at present). There are many ways to employ this system...

Decide on the best way to make tickets/reservations available to parishioners

Decide on the best way to make tickets/reservations available to those who do not regularly come to Mass

Possibilities: Distributing tickets during Masses starting the first Sunday of Advent

Website or Flocknote sign up (there are also various free apps available such as Yapsody.com)

Phone in system for sign up

Keeping a reserve of tickets/reservations for the Mass

Make tickets/reservations available by pew/by Mass. They will be pew specific and will be clustered (you can get a ticket for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.) The locations would be plotted out beforehand using a seating plan of the church.