



Memo

Date: April 27, 2020  
To: Pastors and Parish Administrators:  
From: Bishop Warfel +*BMW*  
Re: Directives for Public Mass

Dear Fathers:

A number of parishes were able to reopen their churches for a public celebration of the Mass this past Sunday. My presumption is that others will soon be able to join in offering public Mass for parishioners. I'm not sure how many parishes actually were able to do so, but I will be canvassing parishes this week in order to find out which parishes have resumed Masses and which ones yet have plans and protocols in place to do so.

The above noted, I have heard anecdotally about some incidences in parishes of not adhering to the directives I issued in order to resume public Masses. **If a parish is not able or willing to follow these directives, they are not allowed to open for public Masses.** I have provided a copy from the original memo at the conclusion of this one regarding the pertinent elements. Physical spacing is a key element. Given the familiar practice of sitting with fellow parishioners, there is need to remind parishioners who gather of the need for physical spacing (unless they are family) as they enter the church. Seating arrangements should be clearly designated to indicate spacing and a few "hospitality ministers" (who actually function more as enforcers) should be designated to manage seating and to remind other parishioners of the need for spacing.

After Mass, areas that have been used need to be sanitized. I realize that this seems strange, but it is all a part of the protocols to prevent spread of the virus. Some people who come to Mass, because of their profession, are in significant contact with others who may be infected.

Communion in the hand appears to be a significant issue for some. This was discussed at the Priests' Council meeting from which I drew information from the priests at the meeting regarding what steps needed to be taken to resume public Masses. While the

memo refers only to CDC guidelines, the discussion from the Priests' Council was wider and my decision drew from additional sources. I noted that I had spoken with other medical authorities. I discussed the issue with two doctors who are on a Covid 19 Task Force as well as have received information from two epidemiologist. While I had made an earlier decision to allow Communion on the tongue, additional information led me to make this decision. As one of the doctors explained to me, the virus may easily spread via a communicant's breath in response to the Minister distributing Communion. It is key reason why the six-foot spacing is to be in force. As the communicant says "Amen" the virus (obviously very light) can land on the hand of the Communion Minister (or even on the face) who then becomes an agent for spreading the virus. It is likely the Minister of Holy Communion would then be contaminated. As I listened to the scenario, it struck me as not being far-fetched. Eastern Montana has not had the same level of cases present in Western Montana and some of our counties, as far as we know, are free of the coronavirus. This being the case does not remove the need for vigilance which will help to keep infections to a minimum. We are hardly back to life as normal.

More significant in my decision is a recent conversation with several priests of this diocese (and their strong urging). They are in the vulnerable category and have pre-existing health issues. Of the priests who serve in this diocese, 30 would be considered vulnerable individuals (I happen to be one of them) and at least 15 have pre-existing health related conditions that would make them especially vulnerable to serious consequences if they became infected. It is why I added the comment to receive Holy Communion in the hand as an act of charity and out of concern for all our priests. Younger healthy priests may not have such a concern, but senior priests and those with pre-existing health conditions do. I would hope that a parishioner would do this as an act of humility and concern for a greater good. With regard to priests who distribute Holy Communion, even though the instinct is to serve parishioners who prefer the preference of Holy Communion on the tongue, doing so is an act of obedience to the bishop. The memo I sent out on this clearly stated the directives. These are difficult times and we have to address a difficult matter which requires what some difficult actions. Following these directives are not permanent adjustments of normal practice, but a temporary means for us to do our part to get us through a pandemic.

To those who have a strong resistance to Communion in the hand, I note that it has become a familiar practice in our contemporary experience. It has become so as a result of an indult, the norm actually being Communion on the tongue. However, Communion in the hand is now a common practice in most countries of the world. There is a historical development for receiving Communion in the hand that indicates it is in no way an aberrant practice. In the earliest centuries of the Church, it would have been a common practice. It just happens that one of the readings from the Office of Readings recently was from a homily of a 5<sup>th</sup> century bishop, St. Gaudentius of Brescia. He is preaching about the Eucharist: "Daily it is before our eyes as a representation of the passion of Christ. We hold it in our hands, we receive it in our mouths, and we accept it in our hearts."

Pope Benedict XVI Emeritus provided instructions how to receive Holy Communion properly in the hand in his book, "God is Near Us." Pope Benedict is hardly a liberal progressive liturgist! He quoted the 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "They should make a throne of their hands, laying the right upon the left to form a throne for the King, forming at the same time a cross." In an interview from a book about ten years ago (*Light of the World*), he stated: "I am not opposed in principle to Communion in the hand; I have both administered and received Communion in this way myself."

With regard to his practice prior to his resignation for distributing Holy Communion solely on the tongue while the communicant knelt, he stated: "The idea behind my current practice of having people kneel to receive Communion on the tongue was to send a signal and to underscore the Real Presence with an exclamation point. One important reason is that there is a great danger of superficiality precisely in the kinds of Mass events we hold at Saint Peter's, both in the Basilica and in the Square. I have heard of people who, after receiving Communion, stick the Host in their wallet to take home as a kind of souvenir."

Of course, by the fact that a multitude of countries have received the indult is a statement that the Church views Communion in the hand as a worthy means to receive, but it should be received in this manner in a dignified way. I would agree that some who receive Holy Communion in the hand do not always appear to have an interior disposition that perceives Who they are receiving.

Finally, it is important to recall that we are experiencing an extraordinary time in history that calls for some steps that may seem extraordinary to many. As bishop of the diocese, I am making this call. I have provided this information for you to share with those parishioners (or even yourselves) who have difficulty in following these directives.

- Social distancing of 6 feet must be maintained and managed with the assistance of hospitality ministers:
  - When entering and leaving the church
  - With seating — between non-family members
  - During the Communion procession
  - Provisions need to be made in advance to ensure social distancing at all times; ropes, ribbon, tape etc. should be used.
- The invitation to the Sign of Peace is to be omitted, and no sign of peace offered.
- There is not to be a procession of the offertory gifts of bread and wine. They will be brought forward from a credence table in the sanctuary.
- Priests may wish to remind the faithful that they are not required to receive Communion. They may make a spiritual Communion.
- According to CDC guidelines, **distribution of Holy Communion is to be offered in the hand only, with just care and reverence and in all charity for those susceptible to becoming infected.** This includes concern for a number of priests in the Diocese who are vulnerable individuals.

- Tongs or other tools are not to be used for the distribution of Communion.
- Communion under the Precious Blood is not to be offered until further notice.
- In the Communion line, people are to come up in single file line, maintaining a distance of six feet from the person in front of them.
- Baskets are not to be passed for the collection. They should be located in an accessible and suitable location.
- No social gatherings may take place before or after Mass, e.g., coffee and donuts.
- Ensure proper cleaning of frequently touched surfaces in the church, following CDC guidelines, and if possible, provide hand sanitizer at the church entrance.
- Remove holy water from the holy water fonts.
- Because of the difficulty in sanitizing hymnals and missalettes, disposable liturgical aids are recommended. If needed, musicians may utilize well known and familiar music that may be sung from memory.
- Provisions are to be made for cleaning and sanitizing the church following Masses, including restrooms.

I would like to emphasize that these directives are temporary. I do not envision them lasting forever as the “new normal.” Once the State provides an indication that such vigilance is no longer needed, I will provide further directions on how to proceed. I know very well that you simply want to serve your parishioners as best you can and are sensitive to their consciences and spiritual desires. I also provide a reminder that the dispensation from Holy Days of Obligation is in effect until further notice.

Know that you are in my prayers. Please keep me in yours.