



## DECREE

### ESTABLISHING PROTOCOLS FOR THE RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC MASSES

As Bishop of the Diocese of Erie, I hereby establishing the following protocols for the resumption of public Masses in the diocese:

#### PERMISSION TO PROCEED

Each pastor must consider the parameters which I have given below for resuming public Masses. After a pastor has put in place a plan to work within these parameters in his parish(es), he may then resume the celebration of Masses with the faithful on or after June 1, 2020.

Each priest must also consider his own health situation, particularly if he is at high risk. *The permission to resume public Masses does not imply any obligation to do so at this time. Parishes are not to resume public Masses before these protocols can be met.*

#### PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1. For all gatherings inside churches, the maximum number of participants should be limited to 1/3 of the building capacity, utilizing only every third pew.
2. Dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday and holy day Masses remains in place.
3. Dispensation from the Easter Duty (obligation to receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season) is granted.
4. Livestreaming of Masses (both daily and Sunday) should continue wherever feasible.
5. Spiritual communion should continue to be strongly encouraged.
6. Priests and deacons only (no lay ministers) may visit the home-bound for non-emergency sacramental visits but must wear masks when doing so.
7. Priests and deacons may resume regular pastoral visits to hospitals and nursing homes, but only when the hospital or nursing home permits such visits, and only following all hospital or nursing home protocols. It may be necessary in many parishes to adjust the Sunday Mass schedules to allow sufficient time to clean the church between Masses.

8. In some cases, pastors may wish to offer additional Masses to allow for smaller gatherings. During this yellow phase, standing permission is given to priests to trinate on Sundays and holy days and to binate on weekdays.
  9. The Sacraments of Initiation may be celebrated when the pastor deems it appropriate, with due regard for limiting the size of those present and following directives which will be issued by the Office of Worship.
  10. Even in parishes where public Masses have been resumed, pastors are encouraged to provide opportunities to distribute Holy Communion outside of Mass to those parishioners who cannot or should not attend Mass, in a manner suited to the local circumstances using the approved rites to be released by the Office of Worship.
- 

#### GENERAL NORMS FOR ALL MASSES

1. The following actions remain suspended:
  - Exchange of the sign of peace among parishioners
  - Distribution of the Precious Blood
  - Placing of holy water in fonts
  - Greeting of parishioners at the door before or after Mass
2. There are to be no entrance processions, no processions to present the gifts, and no closing processions. The priest and ministers should enter and exit directly from the sacristy, and the water, wine and hosts should be prepared beforehand on a table in the sanctuary.
3. Masses and other liturgies are to be kept very simple. There is to be no more than one lector, one server, one musician, one cantor. When there is music, it may be necessary limit the music to the sung Mass parts.
4. Everyone except the liturgical ministers in the sanctuary are to wear masks and practice social distancing.
5. Pews, door handles, door plates, and other common surfaces are to wiped down between Masses.

#### Entering and leaving

6. Parishioners who are in high risk categories, as well as those who are not feeling well, are to stay home.
7. It is not the pastor's responsibility to police who is attending, but parishioners should be strongly urged to heed the protocols for participating in the Mass.
8. The doors to the church are to propped open before Mass and after Mass, so that no one needs to touch the doors entering or leaving. They may need to be closed during Mass due to noise or weather.

9. In order to protect the most vulnerable among us, signs should clearly indicate at each church entrance that wearing a mask is obligatory for all who wish to enter.
10. At the end of Mass, parishioners should depart in an orderly manner maintaining social distance and should go directly to their vehicles. There is to be no gathering in the church, in the vestibule, in the gathering space, or in the parking lot.

### Seating

11. Only every third pew may be used. Others are to be blocked off.
12. A household could consist of a single individual or of multiple persons. Members of the same household may sit together. Multiple households may share a pew, provided that there are at least six feet between households.
13. Parishioners must be prepared not to sit in their usual pew and must be flexible enough to sit wherever there is adequate room.
14. Choir lofts are to be closed. The organist, if necessary, can access the choir loft.
15. Nothing is to be in the pews. Hymnals and other similar items are not to be used and should be placed in storage.
16. Hand sanitizer is to be available at the church entrance for parishioners.
17. Collection baskets, with or without handles, are not to be used in the pews. Place a basket near the church entrance and ask parishioners to drop their envelope in the basket on the way in.

### Communion Rite

18. Concelebrants and deacons should continue to receive by intinction, except for the one who will purify the chalice.
19. Only priests or deacons should distribute Communion unless some need dictates otherwise. Masks must be worn by the priest and deacon while distributing Communion.
20. The Bishop strongly recommends Communion in the hand, but the right to receive on the tongue remains in place.
21. There is to be only a single-file approaching each person distributing the Holy Communion. If possible, communicants should approach one pew at a time, parishioners allowing those in front of them to finish prior to exiting the pew themselves. (With smaller groups, this will not unduly elongate the liturgy.)
22. Those approaching for Communion should sanitize their hands before entering the line to receive Communion. They are also are to continue to wear face masks as they approach. They are to remove the mask to consume the Eucharist and immediately replace the mask to return to their seat.

23. For the distribution of Communion, there is to be a table next to the priest or deacon with hand sanitizer. *Each and every time* he accidentally comes into contact with a communicant's hand, and *each and every time* a communicant receives on the tongue, the priest or deacon is to use the hand sanitizer before he proceeds to the next communicant.

#### ADDITIONAL NORMS FOR CONFIRMATIONS

All general norms given above are to be observed, as well as the following:

- At present, the Bishop is still intending to celebrate the Fall Confirmations.
- Beginning June 1, 2020 and extending to December 31, pastors and parish administrators (which excludes parochial vicars and residents) whose March, April, May and June Confirmation ceremonies have been cancelled are delegated to confirm their own parishioners. They will receive a letter from the Bishop to that effect.
- Delegation to confirm already-baptized Catholics at the Rites of Initiation is excluded from the above paragraph and will continue to be given in the usual manner by a letter from the Bishop.
- At the celebration of Confirmation, only the clergy, candidates, sponsors, immediate family members and liturgical ministers are to be present. The liturgical ministers are limited to the clergy, one server, one cantor, and one musician
- Social distancing and the wearing of masks is required, except for the liturgical ministers when in the sanctuary.
- In order to avoid exceeding the maximum attendance (1/3 building capacity) and to practice appropriate social distancing, it may be necessary for a parish to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation multiple times, dividing the candidates among the various celebrations.
- For the celebration itself, based on pastoral circumstances, pastors may find it advisable to celebrate *The Rite of Confirmation Outside of Mass*. With permission of the USCCB, copies of the texts of the rites will be sent out from the Office of Worship in the near future.
- To administer the anointing, it is necessary *for the validity of the sacrament* to touch the candidate while anointing. Priests are to use the following method:
  1. Prior to anointing anyone, the priest should first sanitize his hands.
  2. Then, for each candidate, the priest should anoint the candidate on the forehead with chrism using his thumb, sanitize his thumb, and then proceed to the next candidate.
  3. After the last candidate, he should sanitize his hands again before continuing with the celebration of the liturgy.

- In collaboration with the parish faith formation staff, the pastor is to determine the readiness of the candidates. All other requirements, e.g., the retreat, the letter to the Bishop, etc., are dispensed. If letters are already completed, they may be sent to the Bishop's Office.

#### ADDITIONAL NORMS FOR MARRIAGES

All general norms given above are to be observed, as well as the following:

- At the celebration of Marriage, the maximum attendance of 1/3 building capacity is in place. This includes the liturgical ministers, who are limited to the clergy, one server, one cantor, and one musician.
- Social distancing and the wearing of masks is required. An exception is made for the liturgical ministers in the sanctuary, among whom are included the bride and groom.
- The Precious Blood is not distributed, even to the bride and groom.

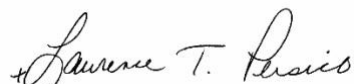
#### ADDITIONAL NORMS FOR FUNERALS

All general norms given above are to be observed, as well as the following:

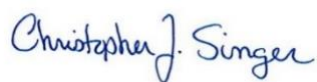
- At the celebration of funerals, the maximum attendance of 1/3 building capacity is in place. This includes the funeral directors, and also the liturgical ministers who are limited to the clergy, one server, one cantor, and one musician.
- Social distancing and the wearing of masks is required except for the liturgical ministers in the sanctuary.

I direct that this Decree be published and take effect immediately, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Chancery  
of the Diocese of Erie  
on this 21st day of May, 2020



The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL  
Bishop of Erie



The Reverend Christopher J. Singer, JCL  
Chancellor