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THE ARCHBISHOP

## **New Directives for Liturgies in Churches of the Archdiocese of Hartford**

*May 10, 2021*

In light of recent developments from the civil authorities regarding COVID-19 measures, Archbishop Blair is pleased to announce two things:

- As of May 19, 2021, the COVID-19 restrictions and procedures first implemented on May 27, 2020, in the document *Opening Churches For Public Worship In The Archdiocese Of Hartford* are hereby revoked.
- As of Saturday, May 22, 2021, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass in person on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation will no longer be in force.

Therefore, as of the weekend of Pentecost Sunday (May 22/23), there is an obligation once again to participate at Mass. However, since the risk of infection, though diminished, still remains, the following individuals may very legitimately decide not yet to attend church: those suffering from serious pre-existing conditions making them more susceptible to COVID-19; those who are ill or homebound or who are caregivers in close contact with someone who is; those who have tested positive for any contagious disease, including COVID-19; and those who are in quarantine due to exposure to any contagion, or who reside with someone who is quarantined.

It is recommended that churches that have introduced livestreaming during the pandemic continue to offer this as an option for the benefit of the homebound and those still unable or afraid to return to Mass at this time. Pastors should remind parishioners, however, that for those safely able to attend, watching Mass online or on TV is not a valid substitute.

The Sacrament of Penance can return to normal with the understanding that both the priest and penitent must continue to wear a mask. At the discretion of the Pastor, confessions can take place within confessionals, reconciliation rooms, or in another suitable location, keeping in mind the importance of good ventilation.

Church halls and spaces can all be used, in keeping with any and all guidelines provided by the State of Connecticut.

## General Guidelines

Given Governor Lamont's declaration that "remaining restrictions will be lifted, except masks" on May 19, 2021, our churches can reopen to 100% capacity with no need for any specific social distancing (<https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Coronavirus-Business-Recovery/Sector-Rules-for-Reopen>).

- Masks, however, are still required for all who enter the church. Also, the rules regarding wearing masks for those in the sanctuary will remain in place.
- Exposed holy water fonts should remain empty. Covered fonts with spigots or automatic holy water dispensers can be provided for parishioners to obtain holy water.
- Hymnals and missalettes can be returned to pews and used during the liturgy. Disposable worship aids may still be used, however, as an alternative solution. It is recommended that, if distributing bulletins, this be done at the conclusion of Mass.
- Pew barriers and tape, signs, etc. that were previously used to direct the flow of traffic in aisles can be removed.
- It is important that churches provide for the best possible ventilation by opening doors and windows when able.
- People can be allowed into spaces such as the sacristy, vestibule, and meeting areas of the church, but all should take care to consider the space and well-being of others in their vicinity.
- The restriction against gatherings before and after Mass is rescinded.
- Pastors are reminded of the importance of regularly cleaning vestments to help safeguard their longevity and to ensure that unsoiled liturgical garments are available for all liturgies.

## Liturgical Guidelines

- Adult liturgical ministers are now allowed to serve as Ushers, Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, etc.
- The earlier guidance regarding altar servers remains in force for now, with only one adult server allowed.
- Congregational singing is once again allowed, but masks need to remain on during singing and throughout the liturgy.
- Choirs and musicians can be reintroduced as deemed appropriate by the pastor.
- Entrance and exit processions are now allowed. Even those who do not need masks in the sanctuary are to wear them in procession.
- The presider can pray either from the chair or the altar at appropriate times, with the altar server holding the Roman Missal or other items as needed.
- The Offertory collection can be restored using baskets with extended handles, but individual baskets or plates are not to be passed from person to person. Collection boxes at the entrances of the church are also a suitable alternative.
- There is still to be no Offertory procession bringing forward the gifts.
- A secondary side corporal is no longer required when preparing the altar.

- The Sign of Peace can be announced and reinstated but is only to be exchanged without touching.
- The COVID-19 procedures for distributing Holy Communion will remain in place for now:
  - Ministers of Holy Communion sanitize their hands prior to distributing.
  - Both the ministers of Holy Communion and those receiving are to wear masks.
  - Communicants will receive the consecrated host in their hand, step to the side, lower their mask, consume the host, replace their mask, and return to their pew.
  - Communion on the tongue should continue to be discouraged for the sake of the health of others. Those who receive in this manner should receive only after everyone else has received.
  - There is still to be no distribution of the Precious Blood, and this continues to apply to deacons as well.
- Holy Communion is to be distributed during the Mass at the prescribed time and should not be delayed until after the conclusion of the liturgy.
- Outdoor Masses continue to be an option and are allowed.

### **Cleaning & Disinfecting Guidelines**

- Given the CDC's update on April 5, 2021, regarding the cleaning and disinfecting of homes and buildings (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>), the disinfecting/sanitizing practices for churches can be replaced with general cleaning. Disinfecting is only required as follows:
  - Because the risk of infection from touching a surface is low, the CDC now recommends for buildings in community settings that cleaning once a day with products containing soap or detergent is usually enough to sufficiently remove virus that may be on surfaces. A space need only be cleaned *and* disinfected if there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 in the facility within the last 24 hours.
  - While parishes may choose to continue regular disinfection practices or choose to clean more often than once a day (especially in high traffic areas, in spaces occupied by young children, or both prior to and following the conclusion of all Masses on Sundays), the base recommended procedure is that which is described above.
- Given these new procedures and the guidance of the State of Connecticut that “all establishments must follow CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting guidelines” parishes are asked to consider their current cleaning and disinfecting procedures and make any appropriate updates (<https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Coronavirus-Business-Recovery/Sector-Rules-for-Reopen>).