DIOCESE OF OAKLAND

PROTOCOL FOR RESUMING PUBLIC MASSES

As people of faith, we must always be aware of the importance of acting in a socially responsible way, to give good example to others, and to act with charity toward all. Everything possible should be done to provide the church’s sacramental life in a timely and reasonable way. The current situation remains dangerous and fragile, and civil law varies within our two counties. While much has been achieved, there remains the potential that the gains could be lost by a second more virulent wave.

Our first consideration is the spiritual and physical health of the faithful and those whom they encounter, especially the most vulnerable—the elderly and those with chronic illness. We must rely on medical professionals and governmental standards to inform our decisions.

General Guidelines/Recommendations

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday and Holy Day Masses continues until further notice. Although the faithful are dispensed from their obligation to attend Mass, they are encouraged to spend time in prayer on Sunday (such as following a livestream Mass or participating in a spiritual or corporal act of mercy). The obligation to receive Holy Communion in the Easter Season is dispensed in this diocese, this year. Out of an abundance of caution for those at high risk, the dispensation from attending Sunday Mass continues even after public Masses resume.

The faithful might be encouraged to attend a weekday Mass with smaller crowds. Priests are encouraged to use Sunday Mass texts on weekdays, when permissible. When the calendar permits, priests may continue using the Mass in the Time of Pandemic with the Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions IV: Jesus Who Went About Doing Good.

Those who are at higher risk of COVID-19 (e.g., those who are sixty-five and older or who have underlying health conditions) are to continue staying at home. Likewise, anyone with a temperature, a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling ill, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies. As circumstances allow, a visit from a priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible.

Clergy and lay ministers are encouraged to be tested for COVID-19 where this is possible.

A priest, deacon, or other minister with a respiratory infection of any kind should not distribute Communion. Priests who are not comfortable distributing communion, by reason of age or health, should feel free to delegate that to another minister.

At this time, the number of Extraordinary Ministers should be kept to a minimum to assure strict adherence to required protocol.
Parishes should continue to livestream Masses if feasible or direct parishioners to a website listing of livestream links, even after public Masses resume.

Written parental permission is required if minors are serving at a Mass that is being live streamed. (Permission form attached)

Parishes are not to hold events before or after Mass. Areas that might attract gatherings (e.g. where “coffee hour” would normally take place) should be locked.

In order to resume public Masses, each parish is required to prepare a Parish Reopening Plan and submit it to the Office of the Bishop. Then, continued robust communication is essential to keep parishioners apprised of the evolving conditions.

Ushers are critical for social distancing to work and need to be thoroughly trained in crowd management. They will be the ones to assure people are seated and dismissed properly, guide the communion process, and determine when capacity has been reached. Parishioners are to follow directions of ushers before and during Mass. If the usher pool is limited, perhaps high school students, confirmandi, and groups like the Knights of Columbus could be trained and called into service.

**Physical Arrangements and Procedures**

All faithful able to do so are asked to bring their own hand sanitizer and mask. Churches will provide a limited supply of masks and hand sanitizer if it is possible.

**Statues, door handles, items of devotion that may be touched, need to be disinfected after every Mass.** Each parish is to identify an established volunteer core to assist in doing this. See the link for CDC cleaning guidelines. [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html)

Signage should be posted at entrances to the church, alerting people to the safety protocols to be observed, particularly the use of face covering and the six-foot social distancing rule.

Doors must be propped open as people come and leave. If practical, post “Entrance Only and “Exit Only” signs.

The six-foot distance rule must be strictly enforced—taping off every-other pew, for instance. Place tape on the floor to ensure proper distance in the Communion line. Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row.

“Cry Rooms” should be closed and locked.

Holy water fonts are to remain empty.

Masses held inside of church should be kept short, not rushed, but kept to 30 to 40 minutes, if possible. Masses can also be held in an alternative site such as a parish hall, in which case the Mass times should be staggered in order to avoid outdoor crowding when people arrive and leave. Alternative sites must comply with the same guidelines. The scheduling of Masses will be left to the discretion of the Pastor. In anticipation of people arriving for one Mass while those at the previous Mass are still leaving the church, separate designated ports of ingress and egress should be used in order to avoid crowding.
Congregational singing should be limited to when a liturgical action requires it (e.g., Eucharistic Acclamations, but not “Entrance Songs”). Music can be provided by one musician and one cantor and, if proper distance can be kept, a small choir.

Given the reduced number of people at Mass due to the social distancing guidelines, a system will have to be implemented to limit the number of persons attending any given Mass. Methods such as Eventbrite or reservations can be helpful in this regard. Ushers and other volunteers will assist in ensuring that no more than the number permissible will attend each Mass. Provisions should be made to accommodate overflow in other buildings, if possible.

Parishes will have to develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other. It is advisable to have ushers placed at the restrooms to monitor compliance with these regulations. Restrooms will need to be regularly sanitized by properly-trained parish staff.

At the beginning of Mass, an announcement should be made communicating the temporary liturgical alterations (e.g., no handshake at the Sign of Peace, holding hands at the Lord’s Prayer, and explaining the distribution of Holy Communion).

### Protocol for Mass

All liturgical aids (e.g., hymnals, missalettes, pencils, envelopes, etc.) are to be removed from the church and kept in storage until further notice.

All liturgical ministers should maintain a 6-foot distance from the priest and from each other. This includes any time they may be together in the sacristy before or after Mass.

The person preparing hosts for Mass must follow strict guideline for handling them, including using a hand sanitizer and mask.

Liturgical ministers do not wear masks during Mass.

All ministers must sanitize their hands before Mass.

Processions are to be suspended at public Masses. The priest and other ministers should enter the sanctuary from the sacristy (or the most direct path the building allows).

Use of altar servers should be limited. If possible, use a stand at the Chair instead of a server holding the missal. Or, preside from the altar.

The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) is omitted.

Only long-handled baskets may be passed during the collection. If not available, receptacles for offerings should be placed in strategic locations before Mass begins. Cash should be “quarantined” for three days before counting. Those handling money, checks and envelopes must wear protective sanitation gloves and wash their hands after touching these items. Encourage (mail-in) checks and online giving.
A deacon (if present) or a server brings the Missal, chalice, paten/ciborium, and cruets of wine and water to the altar, while the priest remains at the chair. After the deacon or server moves away, the priest goes to the altar and arranges the items on the altar.

The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance, either at a credence table near the altar or at the side of the altar itself. The lavabo bowl should have water in it already, with the towel next to it. After he performs the lavabo, the priest should then sanitize his hands. The lavabo items should remain on the credence table and be removed by the priest after the Mass.

Hosts to be consecrated for the Communion of the faithful are to be placed on a second corporal at some distance from the breath of the celebrant. The ciborium (or other vessel) should be covered with a pall except from the epiclesis through the words of consecration.

For the elevation of the sacred species at “Through him, and with him, and in him,” if a deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is brief, he need not remain 6 feet from the priest while doing so.

At the Sign of Peace, the Deacon should omit “Let us offer each other the sign of peace” which is already optional. The Agnus Dei should begin immediately to avoid the temptation to shake hands or hug—a reverent bow will suffice and should be encouraged.

Communion is distributed only to the liturgical ministers at the usual time during the Mass. Communion for the faithful is distributed immediately after the conclusion of the Mass, as described below. Only the priest receives from the chalice, which he himself then purifies after distributing Communion to the liturgical ministers.

The Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the faithful. A concelebrating priest should either have his own chalice and purificator (which he himself purifies) or may self-communicate by intinction.

Distribution of Communion

The distribution will take place immediately after the conclusion of Mass, i.e., immediately after the dismissal, with no recessional song being sung. This will allow for the Communion minister to wear a mask while distributing, which would not be appropriate within the context of the Mass. It will also allow for further safety precautions which could not be observed within the context of Mass, at least, not without inconvenience and without violating the symbolic and liturgical integrity of the Mass (which is to be celebrated without mask or gloves).

Before Communion the priest should explain that those who desire to receive Holy Communion may do so at the conclusion of the Mass. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 6-feet distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.

After giving Communion to the liturgical ministers, the priest leaves the ciborium/ciboria on the altar, covered, on top of a corporal.

After the concluding blessing and the dismissal, the priest (and deacon) remain in the sanctuary, while the other liturgical ministers return to the sacristy. At the chair, the priest removes his chasuble and the
deacon his dalmatic. The purpose of removing the chasuble or dalmatic is to mitigate exposure to the
vestments and minimize laundering.

A small table should be placed at each Communion station, with an unfolded corporal, a bottle of hand
sanitizer that is unscented, and an ablation bowl and purificator.

The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion) sanitize their hands (Holy
Communion may not be given with gloves on*). The priest approaches the altar, holds up a single host
and says, “Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper
of the Lamb.” He then leads the people in saying, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only
say the word, and my soul shall be healed.” The priest (and any other ministers distributing Holy Communion)
don a surgical mask or cloth face covering, takes the ciborium, and goes to the Communion station.

The faithful should remove gloves before coming forward for Communion if they wish to receive in the
hand. Ushers should allow people into the aisle pew-by-pew and assure that they maintain a 6 feet
distance. The minister says, “The Body of Christ.” The communicant, still wearing the mask, receives the
Host in the hand and says, “Amen.” Then the communicant steps aside, consumes the host, and then
replaces the mask.

The faithful receive Holy Communion in the normal way. If the priest senses that his fingers have made
contact with a person’s hands or mouth, he should pause, place the ciborium on the corporal, cleanse his
fingers in the ablution bowl and dry them on the purificator, and then use hand sanitizer (non-scented).
The same holds true for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion as well as deacons who are
distributing Communion. The water in the ablution bowl should then be poured down the sacarium (or,
lacking one, poured into the ground in a place away from where people are likely to walk). He may repeat
this process as often as he judges necessary during the distribution of Holy Communion. It is not
necessary, however, for him to use hand sanitizer between each communicant, unless he makes actual
contact.

At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the
remaining hosts to the tabernacle and proceed to the sacristy. The faithful may depart after making a
brief prayer of thanksgiving.

Priests should not greet people as they leave. It would compromise the social distancing requirement and
create an unsafe bottleneck in the church.

After the sacred vessels are purified, they should be washed after each Mass with hot water and soap.

All sacred linens that are to be cleaned must be placed in a plastic bag.

* There are a number of theological and medical reasons gloves should not be worn to administer
Communion. Perhaps the most important is that the person administering the sacrament cannot discern
if he might have touched the hand or mouth of the communicant if he is wearing gloves. Even if he did,
he would need to discard the gloves and don new ones before the next communicant.

Outdoor Masses and Other Services
For some parishes, it is also possible to have Mass outdoors. This is to be preferred if it can be arranged in a dignified way while maintaining the required social distancing, as outdoor space minimizes exposure to the virus. As we approach pleasant weather, outdoor Masses are a good option. This will alleviate the necessity to sanitize a larger church space and serve as a viable alternative to smaller space. Care needs to be taken so that the sacred elements are protected from the weather.

The same precautions and guidelines for indoor Masses should be followed, including reception of Communion following Mass.

Cars should be parked in one area and the Mass should be celebrated in a different area.

The faithful are encouraged to bring their own seating to relieve the parish from the burden of sanitizing seating. The seating arrangement is to be clearly marked and allow for proper distancing.

Parking Lot Masses – An Interim Option

Parking lot Masses may take place with the faithful remaining in their vehicles until time for Communion. In such cases, Communion should be distributed at the usual time, not following Mass.

Parking must be clearly marked and attendants need to be on duty to direct cars.

People must leave their car to receive Communion. Appropriate distance needs to be maintained while in line for Communion.

Under no circumstance should Communion be handed to someone inside a car.

Those administering Communion should make certain the host is consumed. Obviously, no one may take a host home to a family member.

Cars must not be allowed to leave the lot until Mass is over—and only at the direction of the parking attendants.

Handling of cars and access to Communion must be very carefully planned out.

Communion Outside of Mass

It is better to distribute at a time other than right after a Mass that can’t be attended or watched on live stream. Perhaps livestream the Saturday Mass and then distribute communion on Sunday.
If possible, the communicant should receive the Sacrament of Confession before coming. Reading and meditating on the Mass readings, and an Act of Contrition is another way to prepare.

If distributing Communion in a parking lot, allow occupants of perhaps three vehicles at a time to exit their car, wearing a face mask, and keeping appropriate distance.

To the assembled group, the priest or deacon raises the Host and says “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.” The communicant responds, “O Lord, I am not worthy…”

The communicants approach the minister one at a time with masks still on, and keeping appropriate distance from other communicants.

The ministers says, “The Body of Christ.” The communicant, still wearing the mask, receives the Host in the hand and says, “Amen.” Then the communicant walks a safe distance away, consumes the host, and returns to the vehicle.

When that group of communicants/cars is finished, the priest or deacon says, “May Almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit.” Then they leave and those from the next group of vehicles approaches.

If Communion is to be distributed inside the church, groups of up to ten should enter together, appropriately distanced. The same protocols outlined above are followed.

Alternatives to distributing Communion in a parking lot or inside a church include the church vestibule or perhaps the front steps.