

**Memo**

**Date:** May 18, 2020; updated Sept. 30, 2020

**To:** Pastors, parish communicators, men and women religious, chancery staff, school presidents and principals

**From:** Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., Archbishop of Atlanta

**Re:** Update on dispensation, in-parish worship and access to parish facilities

- [English](#)
- [Español](#)

Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., announces the following conditions regarding in-parish worship and access to parish facilities. These procedures will be evaluated and amended, from time to time.

As new guidance is issued from the state, the Archbishop will, while being mindful of the recommendations of the CDC and the Georgia Department of Health, consider whether modifications of the protocols for church attendance and parish offices or gatherings might be in order. As it stands, the size of parish gatherings outside of the liturgy depends on the space, location, and discretion of the pastor to ensure distancing, health-screening, mask and sanitation requirements can be met. Generally, smaller groups of 25 or fewer should be the aim, though 25-50 are allowable. Larger events of 50+ people gathering in one location outside of Mass should generally be avoided unless all necessary requirements above can be met with the pastor's approval.

### **General Notices**

Out of concern for the well-being of all in our communities, everyone is urged to monitor carefully and abide by the directives of federal, state and local authorities, as well as guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control.

The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass for persons with health reasons or concerns remains in effect for all in the Archdiocese until further notice. Because of this, those wishing to participate in Mass and receive Holy Communion can do so by attending any Mass any day of the week. The obligation to keep a holy Sabbath remains and Catholics are reminded that, even while homebound, they are to devote themselves to, among other practices, personal prayer, meditation on the readings from the Sunday Mass and the making of a spiritual Communion. While those who are at high risk or who care for someone at risk can and should stay home and participate in an online or televised liturgy, Archbishop Hartmayer encourages those who are healthy and are not burdened with the fear of being exposed to the virus to begin returning to Mass and receive the grace of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Watching the celebration of the Mass on the computer or TV cannot become a substitute for receiving the sacraments.

Persons are encouraged to take their temperature before leaving home and to avoid coming to church if the temperature is 99.6 or greater. Taking of temperature at church entrances is allowed, according to a parish's published or announced procedure. Anyone who is not feeling well should remain at home, out of concern for others. Those who are at risk or who care for those at risk and those who are concerned that they or their family might become sick should stay at home and view broadcast or online Masses. As it is possible, parishes should continue to offer online Masses even as attendance at some Masses becomes available.

### **Preparing Churches and Other Buildings**

Parishes are encouraged to deep-clean their facilities regularly, including carpets, pews, restrooms, water fountains, doorknobs, light switches, microphones, music stands, chairs and other furniture. Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed, and allow for proper drying times. Thoroughly clean surfaces between church uses. More time may be required between Masses in order to permit necessary cleaning. Because of distancing requirements, Masses will likely need to be celebrated in the larger church or outside rather than in a chapel.

Temporarily remove materials from pews and chairs—hymnals, missalettes, bibles, pens, information. Post signs requiring non-contact greetings. Cry rooms and nurseries are to be closed. Holy Water fonts should remain empty, but parishes should allow for Holy Water to be taken to homes. Sanitizer is to be available at church entrances, and, if possible, entrance doors should be propped open.

Minimize entry points into a church for usher placement, one-way direction, and sanitizing. Pews should be taped off and marked to ensure six feet of distance in all directions between household groups or individuals. Seating should take place filling in from the front to the back until the maximum available space has been reached and the usher is able to determine that no more may be seated in church. The use of overflow spaces is encouraged, where the same distancing requirements are in effect as in church.

### **Masses and Church Gatherings**

Where a priest's health is not impeded, daily Mass can continue on an announced schedule. Churches may also be open for prayer and adoration on an announced schedule. Parishes may use a reservation system or first-come, first-admitted procedure. Outdoor Masses allowing for greater attendance are permitted, and social distancing measures are to be observed outdoors. If people attend outdoor Masses in their cars, they are to get out and stand to receive Holy Communion.

The faithful are required to use face masks, as are ministers of Holy Communion. Priest celebrants are to refrain from using a face mask except during distribution of Holy Communion. Hand sanitizer is to be used by ushers, ministers of Holy Communion, servers, lectors, volunteers and those who clean the church.

The gifts of bread and wine are to be brought directly from the credence table or placed on the altar without a procession. Unconsecrated hosts should be placed on a corporal away from the center of the altar. There should be no physical contact at the Our Father or the Sign of Peace. One-way aisles for Holy Communion are recommended. For the time being, the Precious Blood will not be offered at Holy Communion and communicants are strongly urged to receive in the hand.

Concelebrating priests should receive by intinction if there is a single chalice.

The desired manner of receiving the sacred host at Holy Communion is for the communicant to pull down the mask just before facing the distributor so that the host may easily be placed in the hand or on the tongue and consumed immediately. This is preferred vs. taking the sacred species in hand and then moving to the side to consume it.

All locations are reminded that the faithful have a choice as to whether to receive the sacred host on the tongue or in the hand. The Archdiocese has not forbidden receiving on the tongue, although receiving in the hand during the present pandemic is encouraged. If additional sanitizing is necessary after offering the host either on the tongue or in the hand, provision should be made to do so discreetly. Pastors are given discretion to determine how Holy Communion will be distributed in their parishes.

Rules of social distancing will mean that choirs and musicians will likely be used in smaller numbers. Choir practices are to be avoided because of the risk of transmission and the numbers involved. A cantor and small number of musicians is preferred. Worship aids are not to be used unless they are single-use, for that Mass only. Use of well-known music and electronic visuals are encouraged. Congregational singing is discouraged. Collections should be taken online or by use of an usher-held basket or placement of monitored receptacles where congregants may safely place an offering.

Church offices should be sanitized, and staff should work remotely as much as possible. Face masks are recommended. Maintaining electronic communication and telephone contact with parishioners is recommended.

### **Other Sacraments**

Funerals, weddings and baptisms may be celebrated, observing the same physical and hygiene requirements as for Holy Mass.

Drive-through confessions may take place without the use of face masks, allowing for six-foot distancing. Indoor confessions may take place, with the use of face masks. Use of a screen and a larger setting can be beneficial, always assuring the confidentiality of the penitent. As with Masses, those who are not well or have contact with someone who has COVID-19 should not present themselves for confession. At-home confession for a healthy penitent, if necessary, ideally takes place outdoors, with priest wearing a stole and, if indoors, a mask. At-home confession for a sick penitent ideally takes place outdoors, with priest wearing gloves, a mask and a stole, sanitizing hands and stole before and afterward.

Anointing of the Sick should be provided as requested, allowing for proper safety procedures to be in place. Some hospitals are allowing even COVID-19- infected patients to be visited. Deans of Deaneries should make provision for the sacrament to be administered if a priest is impeded by reason of his own at-risk health condition. See detailed provisions below for the Anointing of the Sick.

### **Delivering Holy Communion to the Homebound**

Governor Kemp has released guidelines on easing visitation restrictions on nursing and assisted living facilities.

The restrictions are based on community spread as well as local protocols. If visits are possible, clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (both referred hereafter as “Eucharistic ministers”) must follow protocols particular to the communities they are visiting and should schedule the visits with the facility in advance. With regard to facilities that include independent living communities, which are not explicitly mentioned in the Governor’s guidelines, Eucharistic ministers need to follow the facility’s existing protocol for visits which should be verified prior to visiting.

For all visits, including those to personal/private residences and homes, the following considerations apply:

- Eucharistic ministers must do an adequate health self-screening according to CDC guidelines immediately before arrival and be free of a fever and any other COVID-related symptoms.
- Visits should be kept to a minimum amount of time in a well-ventilated area to lower transmission risk.
- Eucharistic ministers and person(s) being visited (unless health requirements dictate otherwise for the latter) must wear a mask at all times during visit.
- Eucharistic ministers should avoid personal and surface contact where reasonable and should use hand sanitizer before and after giving Holy Communion to each recipient.

Each parish should keep appropriate records for contact tracing purposes with a reporting and notification mechanism also in place.

These guidelines also apply for the Anointing of the Sick during visits (see additional guidelines below).

### **Anointing of the Sick**

(From the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the Thomistic Institute)

Follow local guidelines on the number of people permitted to gather in a space. Remain six feet away except for the act of anointing.

### **Patient with no COVID-19 symptoms or contact**

#### **General**

- Wear a face mask as recommended by public health officials
- Avoid contact with surfaces
- Set anointing items at least six feet away from patient on a disinfected surface, including oil stock, cotton swab, a paper bag (open and standing up) and hand sanitizer
- Sanitize hands before and after

#### **Anointing Process**

- Omit the laying on of hands
- Sanitize hands
- Use cotton swab to anoint. Dip the swab and close the oil then approach and anoint
- Drop the swab in the paper bag
- Sanitize hands
- Fold bag closed several times. Later, burn the bag
- Sanitize hands after leaving

### **Conscious patient with COVID-19**

**Do not bring a patient to church. Hear their confession if possible, and postpone anointing.**

## **Unconscious patient with COVID-19 in residence in imminent danger of death.**

- Prepare a kit with oil stock, stole, printout of the Rite of Anointing in a Hospital or Institution, hand sanitizer, gloves, surgical mask, cotton swab and paper bag. Don face mask and stole before entering residence
- Do not bring anything into home except kit – no phones, prayer cards, books.
- Avoid touching surfaces, face
- Set up kit outside of patient room.
- Conduct anointing as described above for patient with no symptoms
- Re-enter room after discarding cotton swab, recite Lord's prayer, concluding prayer and blessing. Leave printed copy of Rite in patient room
- Exit room, remove gloves and sanitize hands
- Wash oil stock with soap and water, discard oil remaining in stock, wash interior, replenish.

If the facility can equip the priest with Personal Protective Equipment, he may be permitted to conduct the whole rite next to the patient, provided his kit is placed outside the room.

## **Initiation Liturgies**

### **First Holy Communion and Confirmation**

Pastors are advised to schedule the celebration of First Holy Communion at their discretion, as it can be arranged in light of the numbers allowed in church and the need for appropriate distancing.

Confirmations may be scheduled with one of the bishops celebrating the sacrament. Large groups of confirmands may need to be divided into groups that can be accommodated with only confirmands, sponsors, and parents in attendance—unless and until distancing is lessened, allowing for greater numbers at each ceremony.

The USCCB has stated that use of an instrument— such as gloves or a cotton swab— to apply the sacred chrism does not affect the validity of the sacrament. It is appropriate, however, to anoint the confirmand with sacred chrism using the thumb.

## **Evangelization, Faith Formation, and Discipleship**

### **Considerations for Parish Ministries and Activities for '20-'21**

The link above provides recommendations to assist pastors with their parish catechetical leaders and other ministry leaders in the Archdiocese when navigating and making decisions about advancing the mission of evangelization and discipleship growth in view of the global pandemic. These considerations repeat or build upon earlier guidance offered, and they benefit from the guidance developed by our Office of Catholic Schools and other dioceses as well. They will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

### **Reporting COVID-19 to the Archdiocese**

If a minister, staff member, deacon or priest comes into contact with someone who has an active case of COVID-19, he or she should go into quarantine, report the exposure to [Deacon Dennis Dornier](#), Chancellor, and get tested before returning to ministry. If the exposure happened during a liturgy, the parish should notify everyone who may have also attended the liturgy. If the priest's or deacon's test comes back positive, he should report it to the local health department so they can complete contact tracing.

Please note that people can self-report a positive case, so a pastor or deacon can tell his parish he has COVID-19, but a pastor or parish should not identify an individual who has a case. The pastor can notify the parish with generic language such as: "A person with a confirmed case attended XX Mass." Privacy laws prohibit the release of personal health information.

It is very important for your own safety and for the safety of others that you monitor your health for 14 days from your last possible exposure to COVID-19, and that you remain at home, avoid congregate settings and public activities, and practice social distancing.

If you are not sick, monitor your health for fever, cough and shortness of breath during the 14 days after the last day you were in close contact with the sick person with COVID-19.

Check your temperature twice a day and watch for symptoms.

Quarantine yourself at home except in case of emergency or to be tested for COVID-19.

If possible, stay away from other people living in your home, especially those who are at high risk for getting very sick from COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>  
**COVID-19 Testing.** You should obtain a test for COVID-19 at least once during your quarantine. If you have no symptoms, the test should take place on day 10 of quarantine. You should obtain a test earlier in your quarantine if you experience any of the following symptoms:

Fever (measured temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or you feel feverish)

- Chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose Nausea or vomiting Diarrhea

Call your local health department or your doctor to schedule testing. You can find contact information for your health department

here: <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/covid-19-testingdirect-patient-line/download>. **Please note that even if your test results are negative, you still must remain in quarantine for the entire 14 days.** If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 at any point during your quarantine period, please also follow the guidance below for isolation.

If you seek a test on day 10 of your quarantine, ideally your results should be available by day 14. It is recommended that you do not return to work until a negative result is returned. If your results are still pending after your 14-day quarantine is complete, and you decide to return to work, we recommend that you take extra care with prevention measures to avoid exposure to others in the event that your test result comes back as positive.

If you receive a positive COVID-19 test regardless of your symptom status, follow Georgia Department of Public Health isolation guidelines <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>

Symptomatic persons who are not healthcare personnel with confirmed COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19 can return to work after:

At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, AND improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND, At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

Asymptomatic persons who are not healthcare personnel with confirmed COVID-19 can return to work after: At least 10 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and the person remains asymptomatic.

Note, asymptomatic persons who test positive and later develop symptoms should follow the guidance for symptomatic persons above

Asymptomatic persons who are not healthcare personnel, and who do not work in critical infrastructure who have a known exposure to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate PPE can return to work after: After they have completed all requirements in the DPH guidance for persons exposed to COVID-19 found at <https://dph.georgia.gov/contact>

Of note, if this person is tested for COVID-19 during the 14 day quarantine period, a negative test result would not change or decrease the time a person is monitored.

Some helpful resources for exposure and testing:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine-isolation.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>

### Ushers

It is vitally important that ushers or other trained volunteers be prepared to assist those attending Masses. The following guidelines are partly derived from the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana.

Ushers/greeters should be trained prior to utilizing them for assistance at Masses and should not serve at Mass if they have fever (above 99.6), cough, shortness of breath, chills, loss of taste/smell or pre-existing health conditions putting them at risk.

These volunteers are required to wear masks at all times and gloves if they are distributing papers or collecting offerings; are required to maintain social distancing of six feet, to assist parishioners in the use of sanitizer and masks before entering church, and to ensure that the maximum occupancy (given social distancing) is not exceeded.

At Holy Communion, ushers preserve distance of six feet between communicants; allow one person or family out of the pew at a time. When reaching capacity attendance: If parish does have additional seating capacity in other buildings for live streaming: Have ushers direct overflow to additional space, Assist with maintaining social distancing Utilize same instruction as above in additional location. If parish does not have additional space: Pastorally advise those needing to be turned away: Speak kindly but firmly. Apologize for the inconvenience

Give them the times and/or locations of other Masses

Remind them that they are still dispensed from the Sunday obligation if they cannot physically attend another Mass Advise them that there are still Masses on social media

If using a reservation system, ushers might take the names of those turned away and guarantee them entrance at the next available Mass Greeters should acknowledge parishioners by using non-contact greetings and maintaining social distancing.