



Orantes

The monthly Newsletter of the Office for Divine Worship of the Diocese of Worcester 18 MAY 2020 - SPECIAL EDITION

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Reopening: Phase One

On May 18, 2020 Governor Baker announced the first phase of the emergence of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from the restrictions he had imposed in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. As a part of phase one, the Governor has allowed for gatherings of forty percent of the building occupancy permit capacity of each Church to resume, effective immediately.

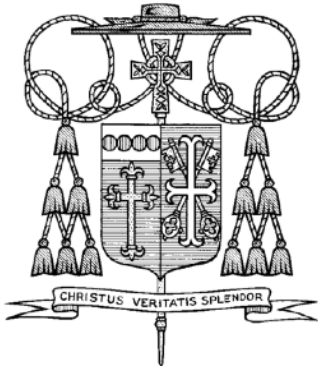
Bishop McManus, in a decree published on page 2 of this issue, has lifted his suspension of public celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy, while at the same time reminding Priests “to carefully observe the restrictions which continue to be imposed by government authorities in the interest of public health” and directing that “the liturgical adaptations contained in this issue of *Orantes*” be implemented throughout the Diocese.

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A Letter from Bishop McManus

18 May 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,



Nine weeks ago, in response to an unprecedented pandemic and in order to slow the spread of COVID-19, I suspended all public celebrations of the the Sacred Liturgy in the Diocese of Worcester. Since that time we have prayed for an end to the pandemic, cared for the sick, buried the dead, consoled the mourning and proclaimed the Gospel through innovative means.

By the grace of God, we have finally reached the point at which the spread of the virus has slowed sufficiently as to allow for us to return to Church and to the celebration of those sacred mysteries which are the source and summit of our lives. Effective May 23, 2020 I am lifting my suspension of public celebrations of the Liturgy in the Diocese of Worcester. In the light of the continuing and specific danger presented by this virus to older people and those with certain health conditions, the obligation to take part in the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation continues to be lifted.

I caution all Priests to carefully observe the restrictions which continue to be imposed by government authorities in the interest of public health. This joy we feel during the first phase of resumption of our ecclesial life must be balanced by a concern for the common good, as we continue to do everything possible to further stem the spread of this dread disease.

To that end I direct that the liturgical adaptations contained in the May 18, 2020 issue of *Orantes*, our diocesan liturgical newsletter, be implemented in each of the parishes and Catholic institutions of the Diocese of Worcester. In the coming days the Office for Divine Worship will coordinate information sessions for pastors

and parish administrators to assure that appropriate precautions are followed. Our Communications Ministry will use all available means to let the faithful know what will be expected of them in order to comply with the Commonwealth's regulations for public safety.

If, for any reason, a parish cannot comply with the safety standards being issued by the Office for Divine Worship this week, public celebrations of the Mass and sacraments cannot resume at the parish until it resolves the issues.

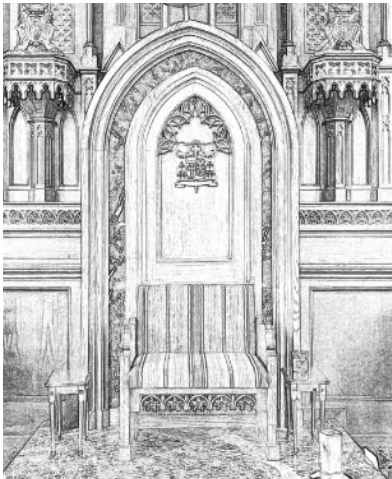
Perhaps the most unforgettable image of these past weeks was of our Holy Father, standing alone before the Cross in the vastness of Saint Peter's square. At that moment, he embodied the isolation we have all felt, but at the same time he reminded us that from that Cross, the Lord calls us "to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame¹ that never falters, and let us allow hope to be rekindled."

With every prayerful best wish, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Robert J. McManus, D.D.
Bishop of Worcester



¹ cf. Is 42:3

Phase One of the Reopening

These guidelines are intended for use in the first phase of lifting the suspension on public celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy, as announced by Bishop McManus on 18 May 2020.

Restriction on the size of Public Gatherings

In his order of May 18, 2020, Governor Baker has mandated a strict limitation of forty percent of the building occupancy permit of any public gathering during the first phase of the reopening. Any public celebration of the Liturgy or public devotions should be limited to forty percent of the capacity of the Church, as recorded on the occupancy permit, including liturgical ministers, the faithful and all support personnel. Careful planning and creative strategies, as described in a previous issue of *Orantes*, will be required to effectively fulfill this mandate.

Continuing Suspension of the Sunday Obligation

Because older adults and those with underlying health conditions continue to be advised to avoid public assemblies, the suspension of the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays will remain in force until December 31, 2020.

Education

Parishioners should be reminded of the continuing necessity of social distancing and what they are to expect when they return to Church with the appropriate educational materials in the form of bulletin inserts, Flocknote, social media and parish websites.

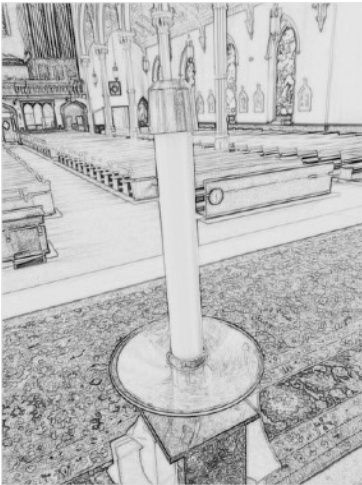
The Church Building

Daily Mass Chapels

The use of smaller “daily Mass” chapels should be suspended with all liturgies taking place in the main church.

Holy Water

All standing Holy Water should be removed from all fonts. Small individual bottles of Holy Water might be appropriately provided for parishioners or Holy Water may be made available in larger closed containers, from which the faithful might draw a personal supply. All water fountains should be turned off.



Hymnals and Missalettes

Hymnals and Missalettes should be removed from the church and stored for possible future use. Only “one time use” worship aids may be used and should be disposed of after one use. The faithful may also be reminded of online sources for the daily readings, etc. which may be accessed on their cell phone.

Signage

Diocesan approved entrance signs (see attached) should be posted prominently at all entrances.

Marking the Floor

The floor should be marked with removable tape at six foot intervals approaching all communion stations and approaching all rest rooms.

Cleaning

Pew backs and surfaces in bathrooms should be disinfected after every Mass. Door handles and other surfaces should be disinfected daily. Gloves should be used when cleaning and emptying trash receptacles. Further guidance has been provided by the CDC.

People arriving at Church

Masks and Social Distancing

All members of the congregation should be masked and required to observe a minimum of a six foot social distance. Liturgical ministers are not masked, except for the isolated instances noted below.

Seating

In order to promote social distancing, people should be seated at least six feet apart in every-other pew. Removable tape should be used to block off pews.

Ushers

Ushers should be recruited from among the younger and healthier parishioners who, with masks, will:

- Assure that everyone entering the church has a mask or other suitable face covering;
- Direct those entering the Church to do so observing social distancing;
- At the time for Distribution of Holy Communion, direct communicants to leave their pews one row at a time while observing the requisite social distancing. As each person leaves their pew the usher will also give them a squirt of hand sanitizer to sanitize their hands before receiving Holy Communion.



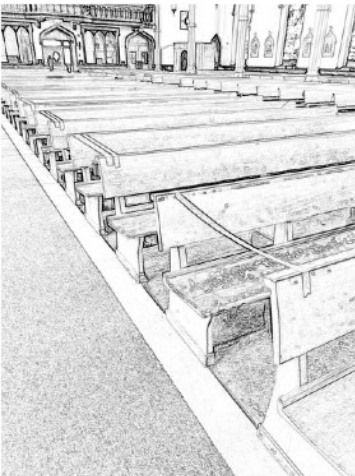
The Mass

Singing

For the time being choirs should not be restored. A cantor and organist may lead the music. No congregational singing is allowed, with the exception of the Gospel Acclamation, Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation, Great Amen and Agnus Dei. The Opening and Closing music are instrumental or sung only by the cantor. All the other parts of the Mass are recited.

Seating of Liturgical Ministers

Liturgical ministers should be seated at a minimal distance of six feet from each other. In smaller sanctuaries where there is insufficient space to separate the seating of liturgical ministers, the number of ministers may be reduced to a server and reader.



Processions

Entrance and recessional processions should be suspended. The Priest and ministers should enter by the shortest route to the sanctuary, without passing through the midst of the congregation.

Collection

Instead of passing collection baskets, parishioners should be directed to place their donations in conveniently located standing baskets, from which gloved ushers may transfer the money to drop-safe. The donations should be quarantined for three days before counting in order to assure that any trace of the virus has been neutralized.

Offertory Procession

The Offertory Procession is suspended.

Preparation of the Gifts

Servers bringing the gifts to the Deacon or Priest or washing the hands at the lavabo should wear a mask. This

is the only time during the Mass when the servers will wear a mask.

Hosts for the Faithful

A ciborium with hosts for distribution to the faithful should be placed on a corporal at some distance from the breath of the celebrant.

All Physical Contact Avoided

The invitation to exchange of the Sign of Peace and the shaking of hands with parishioners at the end of Mass are suspended.

Distribution of Holy Communion

Both Species

The distribution of the Precious Blood to all but the Priest, concelebrants and Deacons is suspended. When there is a Deacon or concelebrant(s), two Chalices should be consecrated: the Main Chalice and a Chalice for the Deacon and/or concelebrants. After the *Ecce Agnus Dei*, the Priest consumes all of the Precious Blood in the Main Chalice. If there are concelebrants, each receives the Precious Blood by intinction, after which the Deacon consumes what remains of the Precious Blood. This avoids the necessity of two persons drinking from the same Chalice. Deacons are not permitted to receive by intincting the host by themselves.



Communion on the Tongue

While a “public health preference” for Holy Communion in the hand is included on the Entrance Sign (cf., above), Priests should be aware that they do not have a right to refuse Holy Communion on the tongue.

Ministers of Holy Communion

Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be masked (in light of the dialogue) but

not gloved. They should use hand sanitizer before and after the distribution of Holy Communion;

During the Distribution of Holy Communion

While the distribution of Holy Communion takes place in the usual manner, care should be taken to avoid all contact with the hands or tongue of the communicant. To this end, a small table should be placed at each communion station with an unfolded corporal and a bottle of hand sanitizer. Whenever the minister of Holy Communion senses that he has touched the hand or tongue of a communicant he stops immediately, places the ciborium on the corporal, purifies his fingers, and returns to the distribution of Holy Communion.

Older Priests

Priests in a higher risk group may choose not to distribute Communion when younger/healthier Priests, Deacons or even extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are present.

Cleansing Vessels

All Communion Vessels should be thoroughly washed after each Mass once they have been purified.



Celebration of the Sacraments

The Sacrament of Penance

Traditional confessionals are unsafe due to the closeness of the Priest and penitent separated only by a grill not designed to prevent virus transmission. Likewise, the transmission of the virus from one penitent to another is possible via the surfaces touched and the dangers from aerosolization of the virus in a small space. The small size of most “Rooms of Reconciliation” present similar potential dangers.

A somewhat improved alternative would be the use of a large open space, such as a parish hall, in the middle of which are placed chairs for the Priest and penitent at least six feet apart. A screen or grill can be used for to preserve anonymity. Both Priest and penitent should wear a mask or face covering. A “waiting area” outside of hearing distance would also be required, sufficient in size for penitents to wait, separated by at least six feet. Even a space as large as a parish hall, however, presents the possibility of transmission through aerosolization of the virus, particularly if it lacks sufficient ventilation.

The best solution to hearing confessions is to use an outdoor space, weather permitting. An outdoor setting provides sufficient ventilation to mitigate concerns with aerosolization of the virus.

The common practice of “drive by confessions” is safe, provided that both Priest and penitent remain masked and at a social distance of at least six feet. The confession should not last longer than three to five minutes, in order to limit exposure of both Priest and penitent. The only disadvantage of “drive by confessions” seems to be the loss of anonymity.

Alternatively, an outdoor space could be created, with a free-standing wall with a grill in the center, similar to the traditional confessional. A chair is placed on the ground three feet from the screen on one side. A chair for the confessor is placed three feet on the other side, thus providing for both anonymity and safety. Both Priest and penitent should be masked. At the conclusion of a series of confessions, the grill should be disinfected on both sides.

The Sacrament of Penance in the Home

If a home visit for the Sacrament of Penance is requested for a person who is elderly or in a high risk group, only Priests who are not similarly at risk should perform this ministry. The Priest should first consider meeting the person outside of their home

on the porch or lawn, provided that there is sufficient space for a private conversation. A six foot social distance should be maintained, both the Priest and confessor should be masked and every effort should be made to limit the amount of time for the confession to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus.

Anointing of the Sick

While Designated Priest Ministers of the Sick will continue to be available on a limited basis, parish Priests may begin to return to administering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to their parishioners.

If a person has been diagnosed COVID+ it is essential that the Priest be assisted by a medical professional who will provide the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and direct the Priest in the correct method for putting on and taking off the mask, gloves, gown and shield, where appropriate. In addition, all the precautions listed below should be carefully followed.

If a person has not been diagnosed COVID+ it is still important to take certain precautions in case the patient might be infectious without showing symptoms. Therefore, certain minimal precautions should always be followed:

Both the Priest and the sick person should be masked. The Priest should observe a social distance of at least six feet from the sick person at all times, except for the moment of anointing. The imposition of hands should be omitted.

The Priest should avoid contact with surfaces in the home as much as possible. He should choose a recently disinfected surface at least six feet from the sick person on which to place his oil stock, a Q-tip or other cotton swab, a paper bag and alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Before and after the *Rite of Anointing*, the Priest should disinfect his hands with the hand sanitizer.

The rite is celebrated as usual (omitting the imposition of hands), with the exception of the act of anointing the sick person. At the moment of anointing, the Priest should dip the Q-tip into the oil stock and anoint the sick person on the forehead



only, omitting the anointing of the hands. The swab is then placed in the paper bag and should later be burned.

At the conclusion of the rite the Priest should once again use the hand sanitizer. In the interest of reducing the risk for virus transmission shorter forms of the rites for the sick should usually be used.

Funerals

Funeral Masses may be celebrated with the same restrictions as for any Mass, including the appropriate provisions for social distancing and liturgical adaptations.



The family should be seated by the Funeral Director upon arriving in Church. The Priest should perform the rites of greeting, sprinkling and clothing the body with the Funeral Pall while observing a strict social distance of six feet from all other persons.

The Rites of Commendation are also performed as usual. The body should be incensed from at the head of the coffin and not by walking around it in the interest of observing a strict social distance of six feet from all other persons.

The Priest should refrain from greeting the family at the end of Mass and should immediately return to the sacristy while they are leaving the Church. A similar effort to observe social distancing during the Cemetery Committal should be observed.

Weddings

The Sacrament of Matrimony may be celebrated with the same restrictions as for any Mass, including the appropriate provisions for social distancing and liturgical adaptations.

Baptisms

Only individual Baptisms may be celebrated with a prudent limitation on the number of people present and the requisite considerations for social distancing.

All rites should take place with the family remaining in the pew, with the exception of the moment of Baptism, when either the parents or godparents approach the font while carrying the child and then, after the explanatory rites, return to their pew. All who are present wear masks throughout, with the exception of the Priest and the child to be baptized.

The signing of the child may be done at a distance of six feet by the Priest making the sign of the cross, as in a typical blessing. The parents and godparents may make the sign of the cross on the child's forehead.

The pre-baptismal anointing and the imposition of hands are omitted.

Water should be blessed for each Baptism. Following each Baptism the water should be drained into a sacrarium or poured into the ground, after which the font and all surrounding surfaces should be carefully cleaned.

Before pouring the water for the Baptism, the Priest puts on a mask and wears it for the Baptism, anointing with Chrism, clothing with the Baptismal garment and presentation of the lit candle. He then removes the mask, standing, once again, at a six foot social distance.

Confirmations

Additional information will be forthcoming concerning the Sacrament of Confirmation as civil restrictions on crowd sizes are further modified.



A Prayer in Time of Pandemic



O God,
whose Only Begotten Son
bore the weight of human suffering
for our salvation,
hear the prayers of your Church
for our sick brothers and sisters
and deliver us from this time of trial.

Open our ears and our hearts
to the voice of your Son:
Be not afraid, for I am with you always.

Bless all doctors and nurses,
researchers and public servants;
give us the wisdom to do what is right
and the faith to endure this hour,
that we might gather once again
to praise your name in the heart of your Church,
delivered from all distress
and confident in your mercy.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.