



# Return to Mass Guidelines for the Diocese of Salt Lake City

Current: 5-27-2020

(Adapted from “Catholic Mutual... “Cares”, rev. 5-12-20  
and FDLC Pastoral Consideration for the Reopening of Church, 5-2020)

Our first consideration must be for the health and safety of our parishioners and those whom they will encounter. **The Common Good is our priority.** Once it was determined that our State Government was gradually going to allow for larger gatherings, Bishop Oscar A. Solis charged local pastors and administrators to determine when they would be able to offer public Masses for a limited number of worshippers, given the “social distancing” and other local restrictions faced. We do not assume the spread of the virus has diminished because of these new guidelines. We should maintain and continue our precautionary measures to ensure we are protecting one another from the spread of COVID-19. It will be important to monitor any increase of COVID-19 cases in our community. In addition to the CDC and our State/Local Health Department recommendations, the following guidelines should be considered for everyone’s safety as we gradually reopen our churches for worship and prayer.

## **General Recommendations**

- Parishioners and all church staff who are considered “high risk” and more vulnerable to the virus should be reminded not to attend Mass in the church but to participate in virtual or televised Masses. The “Sunday and Holy Day Obligation” to attend Mass continues to be dispensed until it is safe to return to Mass.
- Parishioners who are ill or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not attend Mass. The church should post a link to the COVID-19 exposure questions on their website (i.e., have you traveled out of the country, do you have a fever, have you been exposed to someone with COVID-19, etc.?). Signage must be posted on entrance doors asking anyone with a fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the church.
- By entering any church building, all individuals acknowledge that the Church cannot guarantee anyone’s safety in attending the worship service or other activity and take responsibility for their own well-being and health against the

Novel Coronavirus, holding the Church and Diocese harmless (not liable) since the virus can be spread by those who are asymptomatic.

- To reduce exposure, the number of liturgical ministers, ushers, greeters, altar servers and/or volunteers should be limited for each Mass to those needed.
- The use of facemasks for all those over the age of two is strongly encouraged, for at least entering and exiting the building, even if not mandated by civil authority. It is strongly encouraged that masks be worn throughout the service.
- Hand sanitizer should be available at all church entrances.
- Social distancing of six-feet for all people not living in the same household must be observed at all times. You will need to establish how many parishioners can be in the church for Mass. Identify areas on your designated pews that represent a 6' distance in seating. Using non-slip tape or another product to make this separation would be helpful. Keep in mind this may not be suitable for family seating.
- Families can sit together. When seating a family, the usher will need to be certain the 6' distance is adhered to between the family and the next parishioner(s).
- A minimum of every other pew or every third pew is preferred to maintain the recommended 6' social distancing.
- To reduce the chance of overcrowding, the following options may be considered:
  - Add more Masses.
  - Ask parishioners to sign up for a specific weekend Mass.
  - Assign parishioners alphabetically or by lot for those who have signed up.
- Adequate time between Masses should be allowed to avoid overcrowding and provide ample time to disinfect and clean the interior of the church.
- Baptismal fonts and holy water fonts should remain empty.
- Use only enough water for each baptism, blessed for that one occasion. Any leftover water should be poured into the ground -- not poured back into a common pool.
- Remove all hymnals, missals, bibles, prayer cards, etc. from the pews. Parish bulletins should be posted on the parish website or emailed to parishioners. Participation aids should be one-time-use only and parishioners take them home to discard.
- Cry rooms should be closed and locked.

- Music ministry may be limited – perhaps one cantor and one instrumentalist to lead the assembly. (Social distancing applies to ensembles, scholas, choirs as well. Some scientists contend that saliva droplets may spread through singing as far as 26 feet.)
- There should be no procession of the gifts (bread and wine brought only from the credence table in the sanctuary).
- There should be no physical contact during the Sign of Peace nor the Lord's Prayer.
- For social distancing, the location of stations for the distribution of Communion, the Presider's Chair and other sanctuary seating might have to be reconsidered.
- Appropriate spacing between individuals in the Communion Procession should be prepared, perhaps marked on the floor. Or the Ministers of Communion might come to the people in the pews if there is adequate distance between groups/individuals.
- Collection baskets should not be passed person-to-person. Ideally, a large basket could be placed at church entrance or exit for parishioners to drop envelopes or donations.
- Building(s) should have properly functioning HVAC systems to ensure adequate ventilation. In addition, you may consider opening windows during Mass if applicable.

### **Control of Foot Traffic**

- Before and after Mass, do not allow people to assemble or socialize outside/inside of church.
- Install temporary markings (cones/tape), directing the flow of foot traffic in and out of the church. Only one entrance into the church is recommended to ensure control of the number of individuals entering the building.
- Ideally, entrance door(s) should be propped open to limit contact with door handles or an employee/volunteer may hold open doors.
- Orderly seating and dismissal is encouraged. The first parishioners arriving should be ushered to front of church and fill in the rest of the seating areas as more enter. Orderly exiting should start at the back of church and work towards the front.

### **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

- Have proper hand sanitizers and cleaning supplies in stock. If you don't have a plan and the proper supplies, stay closed.
- Vessels should be washed after each Mass in hot soapy water.
- Liturgical vestments, including server albs, are to be regularly cleaned.
- The church, including restrooms, must be cleaned and disinfected after each Mass. Special attention should be paid to frequently touched surfaces (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.). See *Cleaning and Disinfecting CARES* document from Catholic Mutual.
- To prevent additional cleaning and help control the spread, the church should close off any rooms/areas not needed to reduce access to these areas.

It is recommended that daily updates from the CDC and your State/Local Health Departments are heeded and procedures updated as needed. Please refer to the CDC's website at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

### **Distribution of Holy Communion**

Distribution of Holy Communion will be limited to the following directives from Bishop Oscar A. Solis. Keep in mind, safe distribution is challenging to ensure it can be done safely while trying to balance reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament with social distancing and parishioners' and ministers' safety during this unique time of pandemic.

1. Communion is to be distributed only by the priest(s) and vested permanent or transitional deacon(s) and specially trained extraordinary ministers approved by the pastor/administrator of each parish/mission. If the presider is a priest in a higher-risk category (age/preexisting condition), then a designated extraordinary minister could be used in his place.
2. Hand sanitizer is to be used before the distribution of Communion. If inadvertent contact is made, the minister is to stop and sanitize his/her hands before continuing to distribute Communion. It may be prudent to have a small table with the proper items for sanitizing nearby.
3. For a time, Communion is to be received ONLY on the HAND.
4. Communion will not be distributed by the Cup.
5. Social distancing of a minimum of 6 feet between people not living in the same household must be followed.
6. Extra care must be taken not to touch the communicant's hand.
7. During the distribution of Communion: if the minister makes contact with the hand of the communicant, the minister will be required to sanitize his or her

hand thoroughly. A table with hand sanitizer or a bowl with a solution of 70% alcohol and a towel should be placed in proximity to the minister who is distributing Communion. If alcohol is used, it must be poured down the *sacrarium* after the conclusion of Mass.

8. After the distribution of Communion: Each minister is required to thoroughly sanitize his or her hands.

To further assist you when considering a return to Mass, please see the following link for additional guidance on the Decision Tree chart as established by the World Health Organization (WHO).

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-treereligious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-2019-ncov-mg-decision-treereligious.pdf?sfvrsn=f3433c0a_2)

Pastors and administrators are encouraged to share “best practices” with one another, even as a newly established *Diocesan Ad Hoc Task Force on the Coronavirus* will begin to meet regularly to oversee and review best practices in our Diocese.

Reverend Monsignor Colin F. Bircumshaw, Vicar General