



805 S. NORTSHORE DRIVE, KNOXVILLE, TN 37919-7551 • (865) 584-3307 • WWW.DIOKNOX.ORG

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF KNOXVILLE

May 6, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ! During this pandemic crisis I have had the opportunity to spend a good bit of time reading Sacred Scripture. As such, I was pleasantly reminded of the Apostle Paul when he said: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). During this unprecedented time in history where we have had to weigh our spiritual needs and heartfelt desires against the protection of our general health and the health of our families, I am grateful to all of you for your patience and kindness demonstrated throughout these last few months.

I understand how much you are yearning to once again gather in our churches for Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist. From the very beginning throughout this crisis, I made a conscious decision to be a caring shepherd and a good citizen and to cooperate with public officials in every way possible, primarily because of our mutual and serious obligation to protect the health and safety of our fellow citizens in ways determined by the health experts.

In consideration of the aforementioned, it is my hope and desire that by the weekend of May 30th - May 31st, the Solemnity of Pentecost, we will be able to gather in our churches again, of course, by following the re-opening and phased directives of the State of Tennessee and our Local Municipalities. I am committed to protecting our priests and deacons and the parishioners whom they serve. We all must act responsibly by following the directives of social distancing, hygiene and wearing protective masks. By working together as a community of faith we can successfully move through this public health crisis and begin having public Masses again.

Attached to this letter you will find my directives (procedures) for celebrating and participating in a public Mass beginning May 31, 2020. It is important to note that these directives are mandatory. However, I will allow each of our pastors to contact me and seek my permission to slightly amend the procedures based upon their church seating capacity and other unique, site-specific challenges.

Finally, it is still prudent to dispense all Catholics in the territory of the Diocese of Knoxville from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. Those who are vulnerable, elderly or just not comfortable going to a public Mass at this point in time should continue to participate in the many live-streamed Masses our parishes offer and make a "spiritual communion." Let me emphasize, if you are vulnerable, elderly or just not comfortable going to a public Mass beginning May 30th - May 31st – please stay home!

Dear friends of the Diocese of Knoxville, as we move into the future we know that Jesus will accompany us every step of the way, and we know that with the intercession of our Principal Patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and our Secondary Patron, Saint John Paul II, God will bless the Church in East Tennessee with a renewed spirit, with renewed faith, hope and love as we accept, embrace and seek to follow His Divine Will in all that we do!

Know that each and every one of you remain in my prayers and I ask you to continue your faithful, unceasing prayers, always maintaining patience and kindness. God bless you all!

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville



RICHARD FRANK STIKA
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
THIRD BISHOP OF KNOXVILLE

DECREE

Whereas, the Diocese of Knoxville has been monitoring the directives, recommendations and guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Tennessee State and Local Health Departments to ensure that all diocesan parishes are responding appropriately to the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19); and

Whereas, our Local Municipalities have published *Phased Reopening Plans* complementary to Governor Bill Lee's "*Tennessee Pledge: Reopening Tennessee Responsibly*";

Whereas, we recognize the Freedom of Religion as a right of the Faithful and a founding principle of the United States; and

Whereas, access to divine worship and to the sacraments is of high importance for the spiritual good and the overall well-being of the faithful; and

Whereas, as responsible human beings living in society with our fellow man we have a duty towards the common good and the proportionate care and caution necessary to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease; and

Whereas, we as a people of faith, recognize that the soul is susceptible to spiritual death even as the body is endangered by viral infections and are saddened by the current necessity to curtail the exercise of the sacraments and desiring to return to the offering of the public celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; and

Whereas, as Catholics we maintain that Christian worship and sacraments are just as necessary for the human person, indeed far more necessary, than many commercial activities now permitted:

Through this decree, effective the weekend of May 30 - May 31, 2020, the Solemnity of Pentecost, I hereby mandate the following directives (procedures) regarding public Masses {Note - our pastors may contact my office and seek my permission to slightly amend these directives/procedures based upon their church seating capacity and other unique, site-specific challenges}:

1. Pastors must routinely remind the faithful that currently their obligation to attend Sunday Mass has been dispensed and therefore, those who are vulnerable, elderly or just not comfortable going to a public Mass at this point in time should continue to participate in the many live-streamed Masses our parishes offer and make a "spiritual communion." Pastors should remind their parishioners that if they have traveled out of the country, currently have or recently had a fever or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, they shall not attend public Mass at this time.
2. Prior to leaving your vehicle, all parishioners must don (put on) a cloth face covering (protective face mask). Although same-household family members may walk together through the parking lot and into the church all others must maintain physical distancing when traversing the parking lot and entering the church building. No one should ever physically embrace or shake hands with others at any time. Entrance into the church should be completed by single file line maintaining 6 feet between each group of same-household family members.

3. The number of congregates at each public Mass will be strictly limited to 50% capacity (or lower) based on each church's seating capacity. Seating areas must be marked off to ensure 6 feet of physical distancing in all directions between groups of same-household family members. This will require closing off every other pew (or row of seats) in the church (or other campus facility). No one will be allowed to sit at the very end of the occupied pews/rows. Depending on the number of parishioners desiring to resume attending a public Mass, the pastor may choose to additionally simulcast (live-stream) the Mass in another campus facility/space. Parishes that do not have an additional campus space may need to celebrate 3-4 Masses each Sunday. To effectively accomplish the aforementioned, those who wish to attend the public Mass may have to attend based upon the first letter of their last name. As an example, Mass attendance times may be assigned by last names beginning with the letter A—F, G—Q and R—Z respectively. This assignment procedure will also apply to those parishes who offer Mass in Spanish – these parishes may have to offer at least 2 Masses in Spanish or simulcast at another campus facility as mentioned above. **IMPORTANT** – once your church is filled to the legal limit of 50% capacity – lock all doors to the church (and, if applicable, other campus facility being simulcast/live-streamed) - this assumes your church has door-types that are compliant with local fire codes [has an inside device such as a panic bar that prevents entry from the outside but allows free exit from the inside]. If your church/campus facility does not have doors that can be locked and still fulfill unobstructed exit from the inside, you must leave the doors unlocked and utilize an usher to prevent people from entering the church/campus facility once the 50% capacity has been reached. (See attached examples)
4. Holy water fonts should remain completely dry. Remove all hymnals, Daily Missals and other items normally found in the pew book holders.
5. Continue to refrain from passing collection baskets from person-to-person and instead use fixed collection basket location(s) in the narthex so that parishioners can place their donation while entering or exiting the church. Parishes where ushers use extended-handled collection baskets (and the usher can maintain 6 feet from the donor) may continue that process.
6. Do not hold hands during the recitation of the Our Father.
7. Omit the Sign of Peace or exchange it without physical contact (bow of the head).
8. Holy Communion shall be distributed as follows: A single Holy Communion distribution point will be located at the front of the church and at the rear of the church. For those church buildings that have an altar rail they may distribute to communicants who are kneeling at the rail and are a minimum of 6 feet apart. Pastors serving at churches that have transepts may locate their distribution points at the far right and far left ends of the transepts respectively. An assigned usher will call parishioners to the Holy Communion distribution points by individual pew/row via the center aisle (or side aisle for those with transepts). **IMPORTANT – regardless of the location of the Holy Communion distribution points (front/rear, communion rail, far end of each transept or at another church campus location where the Mass is being simulcast) the following procedures are mandatory (non-negotiable):** Once you leave your pew/chair you will proceed single file (maintaining 6 feet apart) to the distribution point. Immediately before you reach the distribution point you will remove your protective face mask placing it in your pocket and sanitize your hands with 70% alcohol-based sanitizing gel/solution (which will be on a small table directly in front of the distribution point). Standing on the floor-marked X (or kneeling at the 6-foot marked locations along the communion rail), you will extend your arms and hands toward the priest/deacon with the palm of your non-writing hand facing up and completely flat supported by your writing hand. The priest/deacon (who at this particular time will be wearing a protective face mask and safety glasses) will then place the Host onto your palm without touching your hand. The communicant will immediately consume the Host, place their protective mask back on and proceed to their pew/seat. Reception of the Host on the tongue is strictly prohibited at this time. (See attached examples)
9. Although each public Mass can include music (cantor/organist), individual parishioner singing is discouraged as it is thought to be an activity that expels significantly more aerosolized droplets of virus.
10. Once Mass has completed, an usher will go to an individual pew (one pew or row of seats at a time) and direct each group of same-household family members to exit the church by single file line maintaining 6 feet between each group of same-household family members. All parishioners should go directly to their car and immediately depart (no gathering and greetings of the faithful in the parking lot).

11. Once all parishioners have exited the church, pastors must ensure the cleaning and disinfecting of touched surfaces (i.e. pews, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks) with household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for these surfaces. Those assigned to clean and disinfect should wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning. If reusable gloves are used, those gloves should be dedicated for cleaning and disinfection of surfaces for COVID-19 and should not be used for other purposes. Consult the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfection products used. Wash hands for 20 seconds immediately after gloves are removed. If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. To prepare a bleach solution you will mix as follows:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water, or
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

If soft (porous) surfaces such as pew cushions, carpeted floors, rugs, and drapes have been contaminated by bodily fluids - remove visible contamination and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. (See Diocese of Knoxville website for additional information on cleaning and disinfection).

12. Additional items each pastor should consider:

A. 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.?) If a parishioner answers yes to any of these, we recommend they do not attend Mass at the church.

B. It may be necessary to 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.

C. Ideally, entrance door(s) should be propped open to allow entry without the need to touch door handles. The doors can be closed and locked once Mass begins and then reopened concluding Mass. If this is not an option, recommend designating an employee or volunteer to hold the door open.

D. It will be important to have orderly seating and dismissal of parishioners. First parishioners arriving should be ushered to front of church and fill in the rest of the seating areas as more enter. After Mass, parishioners should be ushered out of church starting at the back pew working toward the front.

E. Hand sanitizer should be provided at each entrance for parishioners to utilize. Pump bottles could be placed on tables or, there are free standing pumps that you place your hand under and the sanitizer drops down. It is also recommended that you suggest to your parishioners that they bring their own hand sanitizer with them while in attendance.

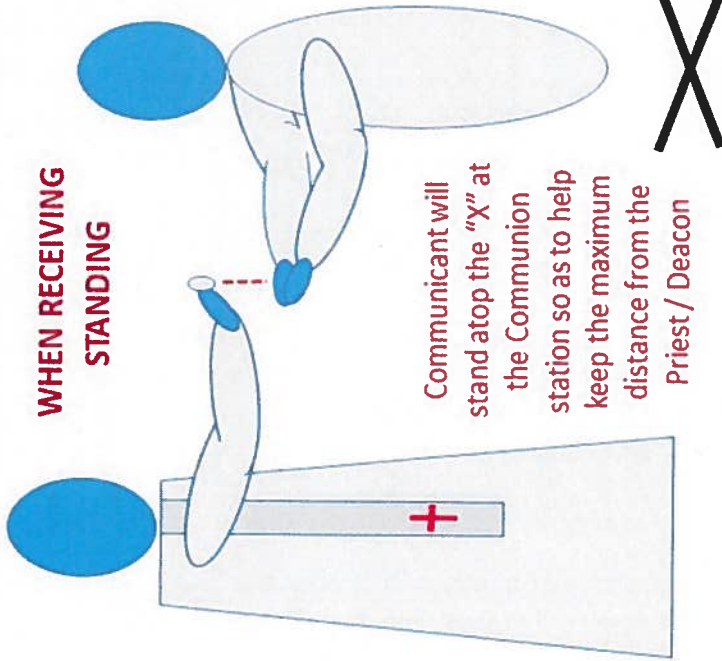
Given at the Chancery this 6th day of May in the Year of Our Lord 2020.



Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville

Deacon Sean K. Smith
Chancellor

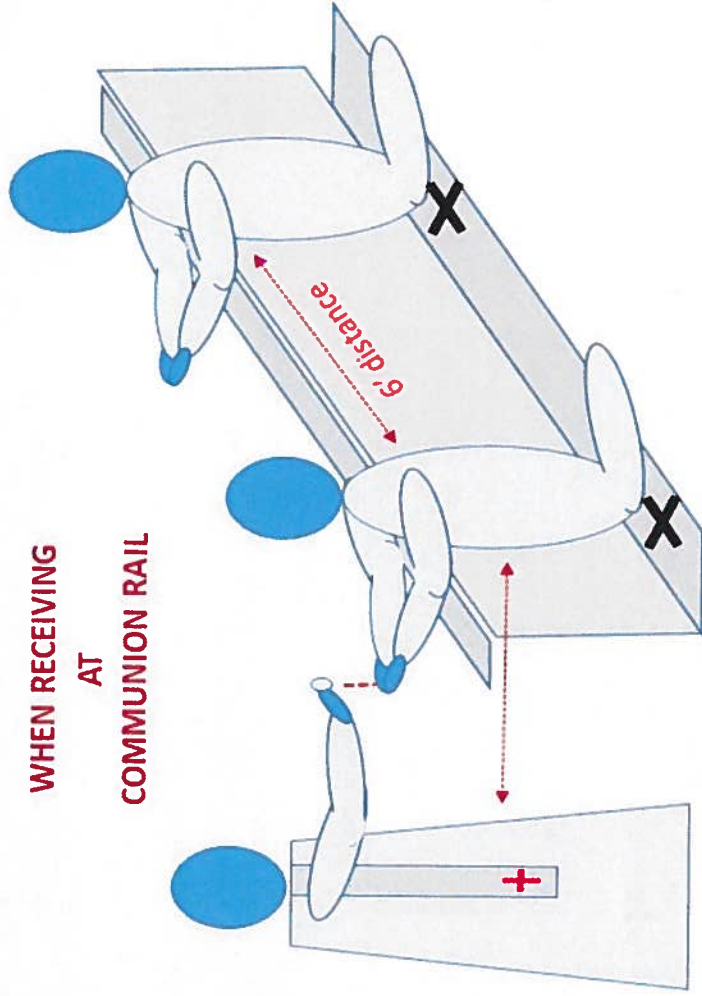
**WHEN RECEIVING
STANDING**



Communicant will stand atop the "X" at the Communion station so as to help keep the maximum distance from the Priest / Deacon

***** Please remove mask and use the hand sanitizer on the table prior to approaching to receive Holy Communion**

**WHEN RECEIVING
AT
COMMUNION RAIL**



When using the Altar Rail, Communicants will kneel atop the "X" in order to remain 6' apart from other Communicants and will extend their arms to help keep the maximum distance from the Priest distributing Communion.

***** Please remove mask and use the hand sanitizer on the table prior to approaching to receive Holy Communion**