

DIOCESE OF SALT LAKE CITY
27 C STREET
SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84103



TELEPHONE (801) 328-8641
FAX (801) 328-0328

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 28, 2020

TO: All Clergy, Religious, Seminarians, Principals, Religious Education Directors and Diocesan Staff

FROM: Bishop Oscar A. Solis

WHAT: DIOCESAN CONTINGENCY MEASURES and PLANS

WHAT TO EXPECT.....When We Are Able to Gather Again for Public Masses and Activities

When I made the difficult decision to suspend all public Masses and Church-related activities in the Diocese of Salt Lake City to comply with government measures, I did so even though it would deprive local Catholics of many sources of spiritual nourishment, most especially the Holy Eucharist. However, I took this step because it was necessary to protect God's precious gift of life and for the common good.

Many are looking forward to the time when the health restrictions will be relaxed and we can start to gather again for Holy Mass and social gatherings. Our government officials and health experts here in Utah are creating new guidelines for how restrictions will be eased. Although we are filled with joy at this thought, it is important for everyone to know that things will not immediately go back to the way they were before the pandemic.

For the Diocese of Salt Lake City, we are planning how we will be able to celebrate public Masses and other Sacraments while keeping to these new guidelines, whatever they might be always mindful of protecting the life, health and safety of everyone.

We know that all Catholics long to go back to their parishes, participate in the Eucharistic liturgy and receive Holy Communion. However, we ask for your patience and Christian charity as we make the decisions that will allow us to celebrate the Mass but still keep everyone safe. We have not yet been able to determine exactly when will that be, or when First Communion, the Rites of Election, Confirmation and other such events will be able to take place. However, we do know that when these happen, there will be guidelines to follow.

As my confrere Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of Denver wrote in an article to his congregation, when we are able to start gathering again, there are five things for everyone to be prepared for:

1. Attendance will be limited. In case restrictions remain for holding large gathering, we suggest local parishes to determine a fair way to cap attendance for Masses.

- Pastors have to examine their church and calculate how many people it could accommodate. Each location has to be marked so congregants would know where to sit, prepare the number of hosts for the communicants, and assign additional Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Eucharist to assist so as not to prolong the Mass unnecessarily. Initially, Masses and homilies should be more brief than usual.
- It might be helpful to ask parishioners to sign up or register if they are coming to attend particular parish Mass so that everyone knows which service they should attend. Parishioners may need to submit their email address for communication purposes. Tickets might be also issued for control.
- An option is to add more Masses on weekend (Saturday Vigil and Sunday) to accommodate as many parishioners possible.
- Another is the use of parish hall or gymnasium for overflow church-goers.

2. Social Distancing will be practiced.

- Parish will have pews/rows taped off to indicate seating
- Church-goers cannot choose where to sit but will be directed to their seats by an usher;
- Families will be asked to keep six feet of separation from each other.
- Be prepared to wear a mask to Mass to guard against germ spread. If you are showing any symptoms of sickness and are vulnerable, please stay home.
- Pews have to be sterilized before and after each service.
- Define Entry and Exit Doors to avoid close gathering of people.
- Entrances to the church might need to be marked at 6-foot intervals so people do not crowd the door and break social distancing. *No lingering would be allowed in front of the church or in the parking lot.*
- Possibility of introducing use of infrared thermometers to take temperatures of church-goers to avoid spread or transmission of the disease
- Ushers and other volunteers may be needed to enforce these safety and health measures.

3. Liturgical changes will be in place. Extra precautions will be taken similar to protocols established in early March during the suspension of public worship such as:

- No handshake for the sign of peace; no distribution of the Precious Blood; Reception of Holy Communion will only by the hand.

4. A general dispensation from the Sunday obligation will remain. For at-risk groups, those who have symptoms, and anyone who feels safer staying at home, no one will be required to attend. Because your family might only be able to attend Mass on an irregular basis, and not necessarily on Sunday, plan to continue to keep the Sabbath holy by participating in livestream and pre-recorded Masses.

5. There still will be a risk for anyone who attends a public Mass. Even with best health practices and strict social distancing, anyone who enters a public space should recognize there is a risk of contracting the coronavirus. Improved cleaning will occur at our churches, but no one should expect that they will be any safer from germs than other public spaces. Parishioners are to be notified or informed of these norms

We will strive for progress and not perfection. There will no doubt be challenges and frustrations. Your family might not be able to attend Mass the first few weeks it resumes. A parish might make blunders and things will not go according to plan. However, believe following these guidelines is a reasonable sacrifice. As we see numbers flatten and decrease, we are beginning to sense the situation improving. If we look for ways to get around the regulations, we will likely create situations that force us to take steps back.

Therefore for the interest of the common good, and ultimately to best serve our own community, we do not want to contribute to a *rebound effect* that would actually push normalized Mass attendance even further into the future; So let us work together, wand follow regulations, and chances are these will work for our greater good.

Furthermore, the Diocese of Salt Lake City in consultation with the Priests Council, Deans and Diocesan Senior Staff in planning for the resumption of the celebration of public worship and other parish ministries proposed other possible recommendations:

1. A establish a Diocesan Communication Network between the Bishop and Clergy, Deans with priests in their respective deanery and pastors with their parish leaders and ministers. ZOOM Video Communications, Inc. is currently the choice platform for the Diocesan communication networking for virtual meetings.
2. All parishes are strongly encourage to have their own communication network with their parishioners and provide information or public service announcements to keep them aware of the progress and development, events and other parish celebrations.

3. It is very essential that Pastors continue to build relationships and close connection with the members of their parish community, and engage and reach out to them to help them respond to this crisis. Call your parishioners and check how they are doing.
4. Create a Parish Covid-19 Team to assist parishioners especially those who are hurting, facing the effects of isolation, loss of jobs and other insecurities. Provide on-line classes or offer resources.
5. Provide continuity in our pastoral ministry during the interruption brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic by providing opportunities for the continued formation of children, teenagers, young adults and adults in their Faith Formation (Religious Education), Reception and Rites of Christian Initiation, First Communion; Marriage Preparation.
6. Support the spiritual growth of the People of God. Make available the celebration of the Holy Mass live streamed or recorded for the homebound sick and elderly who cannot go to Mass.
7. Offer the Sacraments and other acts of piety for their spiritual nourishment – Sacrament of Reconciliation, Benediction/Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary and novenas, etc...
8. Set up “ON-LINE GIVING” in your parish. This will help maintain the spirit of stewardship and the Sunday offering our parishes need during these uncertain times. Donors are at home so call them, meet them using social media –facetime, zoom, skype, etc.... and send weekly emails to your parishioners
9. Other Contingency plans:
 - a. Celebrate parish and Diocesan Masses of Thanksgiving once government restrictions are lifted. Set special Mass intentions for all the coming Sunday Masses: for those who died of Coronavirus, the Sick, Medical and Health Care Personnel, Construction, Supermarket, Service and Daily Laborers, etc...
 - b. May Crowning / Flower offering, First Communion, Rite of Christian Initiation
 - c. Diocesan celebration of Confirmation: there is strong possibility that Bishop will delegate most Pastors to administer the Sacrament in their respective parishes on the same date and thereby have one Diocesan Celebration on Pentecost Sunday, if governmental regulations allow.