



## Directives for Conducting Public Liturgies in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Revised May 20, 2021

In light of the CDC's May 13<sup>th</sup> advisory for those who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>), and in light of recent actions by local health authorities, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is rescinding its previous COVID liturgical policy (dated April 6, 2021) and replacing it with the directives below.

In addition to the CDC's update, our changes are made possible because of several factors:

- 1.) the fact that all Indiana adults have had the opportunity to get fully vaccinated since the end of March;
- 2.) although children cannot yet be vaccinated against COVID-19, the evidence shows that the health risk to children is quite small, and that the transmission rate among children is substantially less than among the rest of the population;
- 3.) overall cases and hospitalizations have remained low in recent months.

### New Directives:

- Anyone (whether vaccinated or not) with a cough or fever, or who may otherwise be feeling sick, should still remain home.
- **Masks:** Masks or face coverings are now optional at public liturgies. Health authorities recommend that unvaccinated individuals still wear masks.

Pastors who perceive sufficient support among their parishioners for the opportunity to continuing worshipping with a fully masked congregation can designate particular Mass times at which masks continue to be required. Another possibility, if deemed adequate at a parish, is that a clearly defined section of the church could be demarcated as reserved just for those who wish to continue wearing masks. Having such provisions available and



publicized as needed would be welcomed by the immunocompromised and by those families concerned about the health of their children.

For Catholic school Masses, the directives from the Catholic Schools Office, which follow state and local directives, should be followed.

- **Distancing:** Strict social distancing is no longer required in churches. However, it is encouraged that, for the time being, a part of each church still be specifically set aside with socially distanced seating at Masses in order to accommodate those who would be more comfortable with that arrangement. At least part of this distanced-seating area may also be designated as requiring masking.

Massgoers may also be encouraged to leave some open space within pews between households and individuals, as a courtesy.

- Where feasible, outdoor Masses may continue for the time being.
- Any continued cleaning activities are at the discretion of the pastor. Hand sanitizer can also continue to be made available. Good hygiene should still be practiced by all – including a reminder to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Since surface and water-borne transmission are not viewed as common means of viral spread, holy water stoups and baptismal fonts should be filled again.
- Choral and cantor singing no longer have any restrictions from the diocese. A pastor may continue to enact particular precautions for choirs and cantors as he sees fit.
- It is recommended that long-handled baskets held by an usher still be used for the collection, so that individuals do not have to grab the basket if they're uncomfortable doing so. Giftbearers can be utilized without any special precautions.



- It is encouraged that the sign of peace resume whenever possible, but still with non-physical contact out of respect for those who would prefer that approach.
- **Holy Communion:** The distribution of the Precious Blood to the people remains suspended. Concelebrating priests ought still to receive by intinction or via a separate chalice.

It is recommended that those distributing Holy Communion continue to wear masks while doing so.

- **Baptisms:** Baptisms may proceed in normal fashion. Per the CDC, currently “there is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people through recreational water.” By extension, immersion or wading in a baptismal pool is therefore permitted, so long as the individual or the parents of the one being baptized are comfortable with it.

If an individual or family would prefer that baptism occur with fresh water, the water should be blessed in an individual vessel and then poured over the candidate’s head into the font. If there are multiple baptisms in this scenario, fresh water is poured each time. If it seems advisable, before each subsequent baptism, the water in the font could be reverently emptied.

During infant baptisms, the oil of catechumens and the sacred chrism may be conferred with cotton balls, and the ephphatha should be omitted.

- **Confessions:** Small confessionals may be utilized again, though maintaining the use of larger/more ventilated spaces for the time being would be good to help encourage those who would still not be comfortable with the smaller space.
- **Pastoral Care of the Sick & Homebound:** No one with symptoms of illness should visit the sick or homebound. The protocols and directives of hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities must still be followed in pastoral visits to the sick.