

COVID-19 Guidelines for In-Person Indoor Gatherings

While we recognize that many parishes have already addressed most of the issues raised in these guidelines, during the past few months the Diocesan office has received a number of inquiries, and we believed it might be helpful to organize our guidance in one document. Note that these guidelines are subject to change as we learn more about COVID-19, so please stay abreast of CDC and Department of Health guidelines.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

INTRODUCTION:

Every Parish will have different realities concerning how they have and will continue to pivot during these uncertain times. These guidelines provide recommendations designed to protect Parishes, clergy, staff, vestries and parishioners. It is important for each Parish to consider the varying opinions and realities of their parishioners. However, as Paul tells us in his first letter to the church in Corinth, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.” (10:24, ESV). These guidelines are designed to address the needs of all, with the concerns of all in mind. To the extent these are followed, the impact on the parish should be minimized to the extent there is a COVID-19 incident.

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and primarily transmitted via airborne droplets and aerosols. Being outdoors is much safer than being indoors primarily due to ventilation. Parishes should consider their facility’s air flow and filtration system, and may want to add fans, to ensure that air flow is optimized.

In order to reduce potential exposures, Parishes can consider traffic flow patterns, and possibly implement one-way aisles, entrances, and exits. Parishes should also consider expanding the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. We also recommend that additional signage be posted reminding everyone of CDC’s guidelines. For example: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs-11x17-en.pdf>

The Diocese recommends that all Parishes follow CDC and their state’s health department’s guidelines, which include having individuals not enter the parish facility if during the 14 days prior to their planned entrance:

- Have symptoms, which might reasonably indicate that you may be infected with COVID-19: Fever or chills, Cough, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, Fatigue, Muscle or body aches, Headache, New loss of taste or smell, Sore throat, Congestion or runny nose, Nausea or vomiting, or Diarrhea;
- Tested positive for COVID-19;
- Have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19; OR
- Traveled to one of the states that the PA Dept of Health requires you to self-quarantine (check www.health.pa.gov for an updated list or follow your local state guidelines).

Parishes should take extra precautions in disinfecting their facilities. Parishioners may want to know the brand names of the products used.

Finally, to the extent someone does get COVID-19, Parishes may want to consider a more formal method to monitor attendance, in order to easily trace potential contacts of the infected individual. Parishes should notify anyone who may have been in attendance with the infected individual, without disclosing who the individual is. See CDC guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>. If someone does test positive for COVID-19 who has physically been in the facility, parishes should follow the CDC guidelines concerning disinfecting the facility:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

SOCIAL DISTANCING: Pews/chairs should be maintained at least 6 feet apart (keeping in mind that family units can sit together. Parishes may want to consider pre-registration, to ensure appropriate seating

(and ensure contact tracing). Consider training ushers and greeters with regard to the Parish's COVID-19 protocols. Parishes should discourage physical greetings such as; shaking hands, fist bumps, kisses or hugs.

FACE MASKS: We recommend that face masks be properly worn (covering the nose and mouth) the entire time while in the Parish facility. At a minimum, face masks should be worn while entering and exiting the Parish facility, as well as moving around inside the facility. We recommend that Parishes maintain a supply of face masks in the event someone forgets theirs.

If someone is not able to wear a mask properly for any reason, we recommend that they use a face shield. Parishes may be able to accommodate parishioners with private seating areas or encourage virtual/online participation.

EUCCHARIST:

In order to minimize the potential for germs to spread between people, whoever sets up the Lord's Table should wash their hands and wear a mask before handling the elements and while they are setting the table. Communion may be distributed: i. in one kind (bread only), ii. by the priest intincting, or iii. with individual disposable cups. Only the celebrant should drink from the chalice and only after everyone else has received. Communicants should maintain social distancing while receiving the bread; therefore, we recommend that appropriate spacing be maintained if parishioners proceed to the altar rail; or if possible, the officiant can distribute to each parishioner's seat. You should avoid kneeling if multiple people will use the same kneeler.

MUSIC:

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and research reveals singing expels aerosol as far as 20 feet. We recommend, therefore, that Parishes either forego congregational singing when meeting in-person or increase the distance between folks in attendance, ask people to sing quietly, and require masks when singing. Instrumental music is fine. Of course, virtual/online services can provide music.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY:

Because children are asymptomatic with a COVID-19 infection, and have more difficulty complying with social distancing, we recommend that children's ministries not continue in group settings. If children are present, it is helpful to acknowledge their presence (for example, in a children's sermon) and to make sure that their presence is considered in liturgy planning.

HOSPITALITY:

Water fountains should not be used. Additionally, we recommend that coffee/hospitality bars not be provided. This will avoid the potential for multiple people touching the same items. Parishioners can be encouraged to bring their own drink bottles, or snacks.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT:

Finally, since cold and flu season is approaching, and symptoms associated with COVID-19 may be very similar. We recommend that you encourage anyone with a cold to stay home until their symptoms subside. Due to COVID-19, many businesses will not allow employees with cold like symptoms to work, which could negatively impact the individual. Therefore, extra precautions should be taken to avoid spreading any illness.