



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF WORSHIP

COVID-19 Update: Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021

“Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.” As we anticipate renewal in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, especially as we celebrate Pentecost, it is a relief to see healing in our world and progress as we continue to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guided by the Spirit, we must remain vigilant and stand in solidarity with those who have lost loved ones and those who still struggle, especially in parts of the world where the virus continues to be a daily cross. As the Body of Christ, we must remain united and continue to show concern for all members of the Body.

As you no doubt are aware, late last week, the CDC issued new guidance regarding masks for those who are vaccinated. The Diocesan COVID Task Force has come to the conclusion that parishes, while happy to continue to comply with competent scientific and medical advice, cannot impress upon our volunteers or employees the difficult responsibility of questioning parishioners at the door as to what their vaccination status may be.

This is something best left to the individual that may be decided based on conscience or medical advice. (See <https://www.usccb.org/committees/communications/covid-19>)

Furthermore, in an effort to allow those who have yet to return to in-person experiences or Masses feel at peace, it is important to allow flexibility in policies regarding distancing and masks. To that end, we offer the attached update to our current diocesan guidelines, effective May 22-23, 2021.

Vaccinations

Participation at in-person Masses and other parish events *should not* be contingent on vaccination status, nor should individuals be questioned regarding their vaccination status or asked to produce a vaccine card.

Capacity

Since every act of worship is public, in line with guidance for other public settings where vaccine status is not checked, capacity should continue to be based on the capacity of each worship space with six feet of separation introduced between households.

Masks

At all Masses and parish events, masks should continue to be worn upon entry and exit, and at any time where there is movement or a closeness to others, for instance, when the Communion procession forms. (Ministers of the Eucharist should be masked when distributing Communion as should those receiving.)

When seated, or when at an outdoor gathering, masks may be removed / relaxed at the discretion of the individual.

Pastors and Administrators should evaluate current policies for rectory offices when individuals may be at their work area versus when visitors arrive and whether or not masks should be required for visitors.

Outdoor Gatherings

Outdoor Masses may be organized, adhering to guidelines for indoor celebrations. However, non-worship activities should be mindful of outdoor event capacities and current restrictions from the state.

Dispensation

At this time, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass remains in effect.

Liturgical Ministries

As noted earlier this year, Altar Servers, Lectors, and Eucharistic Ministers may return to ministry at the discretion of the parish leadership, but until the dispensation to attend Mass is lifted, schedules may be challenging to manage and to impose on those who are hesitant to return.

Sacramental Celebrations

Sacramental celebrations (First Communions, Confirmations, and Weddings) should still follow all guidelines for Masses, with consideration for balancing safety and celebration, at the discretion of the parish leadership. Processions may be introduced responsibly, but as noted above, should employ the use of masks.

Singing

Unfortunately, the CDC has issued no new comprehensive guidelines specific to worship gatherings since February 2021, thus we cannot relax any prior guidelines regarding full choirs or hymnals. Congregational singing should still be discouraged, but those who choose to sing should wear a mask to increase safety and reduce the potential exposure to others.

Food and Community Gatherings

Precautions for basic hygiene should be employed when planning gatherings, whether for coffee and doughnuts after Mass or any similar gatherings, large or small. Ventilation and reasonable capacity and physical distancing guidelines should also be considered.

Sanitization of Surfaces

While aerosol droplets of the virus seem to be the primary means of transmission, contact with surfaces cannot be completely ruled out as a cause. Protocols for sanitizing worship spaces before and after Masses should still be employed.

Youth Gatherings

The CDC has recommended that school-age children continue to wear masks, at least for the short term. Youth should maintain at least three feet of physical distance from each other, while adults should maintain six feet from them and each other. However, there are no longer time limits to these gatherings.

*Thank you for your continued attention to the safety and sensitivity of our people!
These guidelines will continue to be periodically reviewed and updated.*