



# Guidelines for resuming gathered events and ministries on parish grounds

## **All Pastors**

*Carefully consider these guidelines before resuming any ministries or parish-sponsored events that involve physical gathering.*

## **Review**

Starting at noon CST Friday, March 20, Bishop Wack suspended all Masses with a congregation and all activities in parishes. At the same time, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays was dispensed.

Starting May 6, Bishop Wack allowed Masses to resume with a limited congregation. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays continues to be dispensed.

Starting on June 15, Bishop Wack allowed parish ministry gatherings to resume within the diocese under the supervision of the pastor. Each event is to be planned in advance and approved by the pastor after these guidelines have been considered. Our two Catholic high schools, which are interparochial, may resume similar activities and gatherings under the supervision of the principal.

## **Disclaimer**

Any gathering in public space can result in an increased risk of COVID-19 or other spreadable illness. Some level of personal risk (for a multitude of illnesses, injuries, or accidents) already existed before the pandemic began. Participants, volunteers, and leaders who engage in parish ministries and activities accept this risk. Meeting in person is voluntary. Share with the participants what precautions the parish is taking to make the event as safe as possible.

**Contents**

- 1. Purpose ..... 2**
  
- 2. Parish/Site Responsibilities..... 2**
  - a. Safety/Hygiene ..... 3**
  - b. Social Guidelines..... 3**
  - c. Food ..... 4**
  
- 3. Participant Responsibilities .....4**
  - a. Screening ..... 4**
  - b. Expectations ..... 4**
  
- 4. Best Practices ..... 5**
  
- 5. Questions and Answers ..... 6**
  
- 6. Appendix ..... 9**

## **1. Purpose**

- Define what steps and precautions will be taken for physical gatherings held within the diocese and follow up with accountability.

## **2. Parish/Site Responsibilities**

- Any ministry or gathering that is parish sponsored, whether on the parish grounds or hosted at another site, even if it is merely advertised and promoted by the parish, is to follow these measures as they fit the situation.
- All who act on behalf of the parish, such as a priest, staff member, volunteer, or ministry leader, are responsible for enacting safety measures and to communicate them to all participants.
- Decide how people will be welcomed as they arrive.
  - Before starting a ministry, decide whether people will be asked if they have experienced flu-like symptoms recently.
  - Participants may be asked to have their temperature taken (in a noninvasive way such as a remote infrared thermometer device) before they enter.
  - Provide signs and reminders and post them throughout the common spaces and at entrances. (See the Appendix section at the end of this document.) Remind people of risks and safety.
- Pastors have discretion for determining whether an event can safely be offered once the plan for that event has been submitted to him (or his delegate).
- The Pastoral Center and Bishop's Office can continue to offer guidance and support in making those decisions if the pastor is unsure.
- Follow applicable state and local requirements. Stay up to date when these change. Some good resources include:
  - <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov/>
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>
- These best practices are not an exhaustive list of safety measures to be taken.

### **a. Safety/Hygiene**

- Require social distancing of at least 6 feet between each person (families or households may sit together)
- Thorough and repeated cleaning of high-contact surfaces and objects
- Prepare and maintain clean bathrooms. (See the Appendix for tips on cleaning). Provide sinks for washing hands with (preferably hot) water and soap and/or the use of hand sanitizer.
- Masks: (a guideline for pastors)
  - If social distancing (of at least 6 feet) can be maintained between parties (whether individuals or families that live together), then masks are preferred, but not absolutely required.
  - In the rare event that interactions of less than 6 feet are anticipated, masks should be worn and hands should be washed.
- Designate who will be responsible for cleaning (at a minimum, before and after the activity), and do not run out of supplies.

### **b. Social Guidelines**

- Though a parish can be a center for social and community events and gatherings, the pastor is urged to consider the primary mission of the parish. Consider Christ-centered gatherings as a greater spiritual need rather than requests for social gatherings and excuses for people to simply get together.
- Keep the same small groups together over the course of the activity. Limit intergroup contact and the potential for more contamination.
- Avoid carpools, if possible. When riding in an automobile to an event, encourage people to ride to the event with persons living in their same household.
- Avoid shared physical objects and/or materials, including books and paper supplies. Clean and sanitize whatever is used.
- Consider visual markers that encourage social distancing such as blue painter's tape, roping off pews, and spacing out chairs.

### **c. Food**

- Preparation
  - Boxed, pre-packaged, take-out, delivery, or catered items are recommended.
  - Frequently wash hands.
  - If someone is preparing food, that person should wear PPE<sup>1</sup> (mask and gloves).
- Distribution
  - Avoid sharing food and utensils.
  - Offer hand sanitizer and encourage frequent hand washing.
  - Single-use plates and utensils are preferred.
  - Boxed or pre-packaged meals or snacks are best for distribution.
  - Buffet lines are discouraged.
  - If you have a food server, that person should wear PPE (mask and gloves).

## **3. Participant Responsibilities**

### **a. Screening**

- No one should gather in any parish ministry or event if he or she has tested positive for COVID-19 and has not been medically cleared for returning to family/school/work situations.
- Anyone showing symptoms of fever, cough, sneezing, or other indicators of contagious disease within at least the past 2 weeks should not gather in any parish ministry or event.

### **b. Expectations-** be prepared to:

- answer basic questions about recent health and signs of illness
- share whether you have recently traveled or been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19
- practice social distancing (stay at least 6 feet apart)
- wash hands frequently
- if asked, use a mask

---

<sup>1</sup> PPE - Personal Protective Equipment

- wait in lines that are spread out
- enter and exit charitably and patiently
- avoid loitering and congregating in the parking lot before or after events
- follow the instructions of the event/ministry leader (i.e. whoever has the pastor's approval)

#### **4. Best Practices**

- Start with ministries which are essential to your mission as a parish.
- Start slowly and gradually. Not every ministry will be prepared to open immediately. Consider that some may never resume.
- Keep up-to-date on national, state, and local regulations.
- Keep plenty of cleaning supplies and other consumable items (such as soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels, toilet paper, etc.) available.
- Train the leaders of gathered events and ministries for a new normal.
- Make checklists for inspections and encourage healthy accountability.
- Follow the Safe Environment practices that are already in place, notably adult-to-youth ratios.
- Beware for potential causes of scandal. (Almost everyone has a camera!)
- Help to build the good reputation of the Catholic Church.
- Ask for help if you have questions. Please direct any questions or concerns to Rev. Stephen Olson [olsonsp@ptdiocese.org](mailto:olsonsp@ptdiocese.org) or 850-435-3529.
- Stay safe.

## **Questions and Answers**

**Q: Am I obliged to come to Church?**

A: The obligation to attend Mass remains dispensed.

**Q: Can we now resume parish-based ministries and activities?**

A: Ministries and other Church-sponsored gatherings are an important part of parish life. Start slow and small. No one should be pressured into resuming a ministry or parish event before they are ready. Safety and reducing risk is still a top concern. No one wants to become ill after attending an event or gathering at their local parish. Carriers may show no symptoms and still infect others unknowingly. Before any meetings or gatherings may take place, these guidelines and precautions must be considered.

**Q: What can we as a parish do to prepare for ministries and parish gatherings?**

A: Make a plan for each parish ministry or gathered event. Once the pastor has approved the event, implement the plan to make it as safe as possible.

**Q: How many people can attend?**

A: Our mindset shouldn't be, "*How many people can we possibly fit into this space?*" but rather, "*How can we meet while keeping us all as safe as possible?*"

**Q: What about 10 people?**

A: Start with a maximum of 10 people. If 10 people do not observe social distancing guidelines, they can still put everyone in the group at risk.

**Q: What about 20, 30, 100? Or more? We have lots of space at the parish...**

A: Beyond 10 people, do not assume that since Mass size is 25% or 50% capacity (depending on current state or CDC<sup>2</sup> guidelines), that ministries and other gatherings can use the same measure. Check with your pastor when planning events. Have a detailed plan for safety before you invite anyone to

---

<sup>2</sup> CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

come. Consider how breaking up into small groups can accommodate larger numbers of people. Don't forget that all spaces need to be cleaned before and after use.

**Q: What is 25% of capacity, exactly?**

A: Take ¼ of the Fire Marshall's maximum posted capacity for an indoor space, or the greatest number of people that can fit while observing social distancing of 6 feet between persons or parties in the same household, whichever number is smaller.

**Q: How long can we meet?**

A: An hour (or two) with little moving around and proper social distancing poses less risk. Clean and sanitize before and after.

**Q: What about all day?**

A: Talk with your pastor and make a plan how you will maintain safety throughout the gathering and what to do if those conditions change.

**Q: What about an overnight retreat or camp?**

A: At the time these guidelines were established, overnight events are not yet allowed for parishes or ministries. Check back with diocesan communications such as the website and other communications from the bishop for updates.

**Q: Can we eat? What is preferred?**

A: Pre-packaged food, catered, boxed meals, or take-out meals with individualized condiment packages and single-use items are preferred.

**Q: Can we eat? What should be avoided?**

A: Banquet or buffet-style meals (because of shared serving spoons and other points of contact), shared 2-liter bottles, common water fountains, and other distribution strategies that involve common points of contact pose greater health risk and are to be avoided.

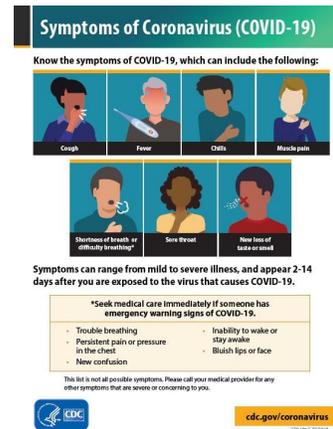
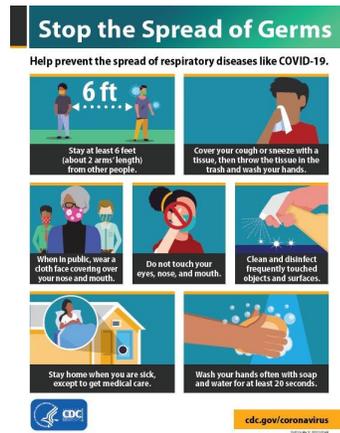
**Q: I still could not find what I was looking for. Who should I ask?**

A: The pastor has the decision of determining whether a gathering or ministry should take place at the parish. Sometimes the pastor's job is to say, "No." Encourage parish ministers and leaders to approach their pastor. Pastors may then seek additional resources through the Pastoral Center. Please direct any questions or concerns to Rev. Stephen Olson [olsonsp@ptdiocese.org](mailto:olsonsp@ptdiocese.org) or 850-435-3529.

## Appendix

Print Resources (Free printable posters to be displayed near entrances and common spaces)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>



CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again (start with page 38)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf#page=45>

Community and Faith-Based Organizations

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

Child Care, Schools, and Youth Programs

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

Guidelines for resuming gathered events and ministries on parish grounds during COVID-19 outbreak