

Celebrating Christmas During Covid-19

LITURGICAL UPDATES 10/20/2020

Archdiocese of Newark



The Archdiocese of Newark has issued **Directives for Liturgy During the Pandemic**. Updated several times, these guidelines remain in full effect and can be found at: www.rcan.org/covid19

As Christmas approaches, additional concerns have surfaced regarding the celebration of Christmas during Covid-19. It is important that parishes and institutions begin planning for Christmas now. Below are several items meant to raise awareness and offer suggestions for the celebration of the Christmas liturgies. Additional information may follow. The purpose of this document is to give some direction as parishes begin preparing for the season.

“The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the Liturgy.” Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #14

When

- **Update**
For this year only, an early Christmas Eve Mass may be celebrated beginning at 2 PM, if you are adding Masses for social distancing and time to clean and sanitize between Masses in order to protect and accommodate all parishioners and visitors. All of the directives sent in September remain in place. These are particular to the upcoming holidays this December 2020.
- Currently, churches are limited in capacity to 25% of occupancy or 150 parishioners, whichever is less, while maintaining social distancing. Parishes may add additional Masses to their Christmas schedule to accommodate more people.

Where

- Where possible, multiple Masses may be celebrated simultaneously (or slightly staggered to accommodate latecomers), for example, in the church itself and in a church hall, gym, etc. All Masses should include the necessary ministers and musicians, and should be environmentally suitable for Christmas liturgies.
- The Mass may be live streamed into other locations on the church grounds where people can assemble in small groups. A *Liturgy Leader(s)* should be present in the room with those present to lead liturgical participation in responses, posture and music in conjunction with the livestream and bring the Eucharist for distribution at Communion time.
- Masses could be celebrated outdoors where possible, weather permitting. So called “Parking lot Masses” with attendees in cars and/or drive by Communion is not permitted.

- Parishes should livestream Christmas Masses for those who cannot attend church. These are not to be “pre-recorded.” A Christmas Eve Mass, however, once livestreamed, could be posted to be viewed later or on Christmas Day.

Who

- It is impossible to know how many people will want to come in person to attend a Christmas liturgy during the pandemic. Parishes need to be prepared as early as possible. It is strongly recommended that parishes employ online or other types of sign-up well in advance of Christmas.
- It would be advantageous to urge people to begin signing up weeks before Christmas for a Christmas liturgy to give the parish leadership a sense of the numbers they will be dealing with and to see if additional liturgies might be required.
- When signing up, it should be clear to parishioners where liturgy will be celebrated (the main church, a hall, a meeting room). Some may prefer attending in a smaller space with fewer people, if that is being offered.

Liturgy

- Needless to say, Christmas will be different this year, but all liturgical norms must be adhered to as much as possible. Parishes will want to have beautiful and meaningful celebrations, but expectations will need to be managed.
- The full participation of the People of God is paramount in any celebration. Since reusable hymnals and missalettes are not permitted at this time, consideration could be given to setting up a projector and screen or other electronic device to project the responses, acclamations and words to hymns and songs.
- When using a screen, it is best to project only the assembly’s parts; not the words to the prayers of the priest, cantor’s parts, or the scripture passages to which the people should listen.
- A one time use only worship aid (booklet, leaflet,) may be used for a single liturgy. Parishioners should pick them up as they enter and dispose of them as they leave. They cannot be reused. Parishes may also post a worship aid on their website for use at liturgy.
- As stated in the Directives, all ministers, musicians, and each household present must be six feet apart during the liturgy. All are required to wear masks for the duration that they are inside parish buildings with the exception of the priest as noted in the Directives.

Holy Communion

- Although priests are not required to wear masks for the entire liturgy, they still may opt to do so. If the priest is not wearing a mask during the Eucharistic Prayer, a ciboria with a lid on it should be used at the altar to protect the hosts from contagion. A larger host for the priest can be put on a separate paten. The priest must wear a mask when distributing Communion.

- As stated in the Directives, holy Communion is only to be distributed to the assembly under the form of bread. Individual cups are prepared for the presider, concelebrant(s) and deacon(s).
- Members of the assembly are to come forward in a single file, six feet between households, receive the Eucharist on the *ungloved* hand, step aside, raise or lower their mask to consume the host, replace the mask and return to their seat by a side aisle where possible.
- An announcement about how Communion is to be received may be made before Mass begins and/or after the Lamb of God, *before* lifting the elements and saying “Behold the Lamb of God...”
- **NOTE THAT THIS IS THE ONLY APPROVED METHOD FOR RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK AT THIS TIME. HOSTS ARE NOT TO BE DISTRIBUTED IN PAPER CUPS OR SMALL BAGS. COMMUNION IS DISTRIBUTED TO THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY AT COMMUNION TIME, NOT AFTER MASS ENDS. ANY PARISH WHICH IS NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH THIS DIRECTIVE MUST CEASE NOW AND BEGIN DISTRIBUTING COMMUNION ACCORDING TO THE ARCHDIOCESAN DIRECTIVES.**

“Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy faith.”

USCCB. Music in Catholic Worship, #6

Music

- Music is critical at any liturgy but especially at Christmas time. Extra musicians will be needed if simultaneous liturgies are being celebrated. If a choir is present, they must be socially distanced and masked. Consider a small group of socially distanced singers in place of a choir or musical ensemble this year.
- Since hymnals are not available, it would be prudent to make use of well known, appropriate Christmas songs and carols. Short, sing-able refrains should be used for acclamations and Mass parts.
- Instruments such as the organ, piano, and stringed instruments, if they can be socially distanced, are encouraged. Brass instruments should be covered and must observe the six foot minimum distance from those around them.
- Some parishes add seasonal elements before liturgies begin, such as caroling, concerts, and pageants. Given the need to sanitize (and ventilate) the church between liturgies and the anxiety levels of parishioners spending time in crowds, it may be advisable to limit or even eliminate these elements this year. Parishioners should be made aware in advance of the elimination of such elements this year.

Distributions

The operative principle is: no one is to touch anything handled by someone else. This is particularly pertinent regarding an expected increase in holiday attendance.

- As currently stated in the **Directives for Liturgy During the Pandemic** in the Archdiocese of Newark, no one should hand out items before or after Mass.
- During the holidays, many parishes offer bread at Thanksgiving, giving tree tags during Advent, Christmas wafers (*opłatki*), seasonal reflection materials, and of course bulletins. These items, if handled with minimal touching, may be left for parishioners to pick up as they enter or leave the church. However, it should be clear they are not to leave items in the pews and anything they pick up they must take home with them. Any remaining items (e.g., printed worship aids, song sheets, et al.) in pews should be recycled/ discarded between Masses.
- Bulletins may be left to be picked up on Sundays and during Christmas time as long as the above is adhered to. Ushers or greeters standing at the doors handing out individual bulletins, worship aids or other materials either before or after Mass is not permitted.

Remember

- The obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days remains suspended.
- Have masks available for anyone who arrives without one.
- Sanitize (and ventilate) the church/worship space between each liturgy.
- Encourage parishioners to sign up for Christmas Masses well in advance to help with planning.
- Promote the precautions being taken to encourage parishioners, but they should be aware that even with the best precautions in place, it is still possible to catch Covid-19 in church.
- Watch for other updates and changes to the Directives in the time between now and Christmas.
- Be realistic: limit what can be offered according to the personnel and resources available.

**And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.**

John 1:14

