



Diocese of Belleville

Guidance for Parish Celebrations and Social Gatherings

NOTE: Diocesan protocols and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis. At this time, some measures can be carefully lifted allowing for churches to gather with more people with social distancing policies and safety protocols in place. All diocesan parishes and agencies should regularly check current published guidelines from local health departments and updates from the diocese.

REVISED METRICS FOR:

Daily and Sunday Masses -

- The new metric for the celebration of daily or Sunday Masses will increase to 25% seating capacity with no cap on the number of people that can attend. FOR EXAMPLE: Assuming safety protocols can be followed, a church that can seat 400 people will be allowed to seat 100 people. A church that can seat 500 people will be allowed to seat 125 people. This replaces the metric of 20% of capacity or 100 people, whichever is less. The established diocesan COVID-19 safety guidelines – social distancing, wearing masks, reservations, disinfecting, etc. must STILL BE FOLLOWED.

Weddings and Funerals -

- Weddings and funerals in the context of Mass will also follow the metric of 25% seating capacity with no cap on the number of people that can attend. Established diocesan COVID-19 safety guidelines must be followed. No one should congregate in the church or gathering space before or after the celebration. No more than 50 people should congregate outdoors before or after the ceremony. Social distancing and the wearing of masks are required even outdoors.
- The number of people who may gather at funeral vigils in church or at funeral homes is now 50 or fewer. Everyone must wear masks and those not living together should maintain social distance.

Social and Professional Gatherings -

- Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois plan allows social or professional gatherings of 50% of capacity or 50 people, whichever is less. The limit of 50 guests applies to organizational meetings, receptions, funeral brunches, bingo, dinners, etc. It will need to be determined the number of people that can be accommodated in a parish center or hall allowing 6 ft. apart in all directions. Spaces must be disinfected after each use. For events that include cooks, servers, vendors, etc., those individuals would not be included in the guest count.
- If food and beverages are served, do not offer buffet-style or potluck meals or food prepared in the home of others. Please check with the county or state department of public health for food safety certification requirements. Food items should be catered or provided in single-serve or disposable containers. Items should not be left out in the open uncovered with multiple people accessing them such as bowls of snacks, food trays, etc. Those not living together should be seated six feet or more apart. Staff or volunteers serving should wash hands frequently and wear disposable gloves and face coverings.

Communal Penance Services -

- Communal Penance services may resume during the season of Lent ONLY IF parishes maintain all safety protocols and sanitizing practices.
- The number of allowed persons is 25% of seating capacity following social distancing, face covering, and sanitizing guidelines.
- The [Sacramental Guidelines](#) for Reopening issued by the Diocese of Belleville for the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be followed.
- Appropriate spaces in the church should be designated to celebrate the rite, such is often done during celebrations of Communal Reconciliation (Form II).



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- It is recommended for Lent, the penitent remain standing on the other side of the “screen” or at a safe distance if face-to-face opposite the priest’s chair. If the penitent is unable to stand, an assisting liturgical minister will provide a chair. When the penitent leaves, the assisting minister will remove the chair and immediately disinfect for future use.
- An appropriate distance should be provided from those waiting to receive the sacrament to maintain confidentiality of the penitents who are celebrating the rite (i.e., confessing). Playing instrumental music whether live or piped in or using a white-noise machine is recommended to enhance privacy for the penitent.
- In giving the penance, the priest should request that the penance be fulfilled outside the church. That is, that no penitent remains in the church after confession to fulfill the penance.

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions has provided a presider’s text for a communal penance service. This [resource](#) is available in both English and Spanish.

PARTICULAR FEASTS IN THE LENTEN SEASON:

March 19 – Saint Joseph –

- The Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, takes precedent over the Lenten weekday. The *Gloria* is to be sung at this Mass and the *Creed* is said.
- While Fridays in Lent normally are a day of abstinence from meat for Catholics, canon law provides an exception for solemnities that fall on a Friday, as the Solemnity of Saint Joseph does this year. Therefore, Catholics are not obligated to maintain the usual Lenten abstinence on Friday, March 19.
- The year of 2021 has been dedicated to Saint Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, by Pope Francis. During this time, the Holy Father invites us to acts of devotion, recitation of the Litany of Saint Joseph or other prayers to St. Joseph.
- On the Sunday before the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the parish could prepare prayer cards to be distributed after Mass. Include a part of the Litany of St. Joseph which names the various ways in which he is a model and patron.
- Prayers, music, and the *Blessing of the Saint Joseph Table* (to be used at home) are available on the Office of Worship [webpages](#).

March 25 – Annunciation of the Lord –

- All of the Mass texts for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord are proper for the day and can be found in the Proper of Saints at March 25. The *Gloria* is to be sung at this Mass and the *Creed* is said.
- Many religious orders celebrate this special day with festivity. Teach young people about these religious orders. Remember to keep them in your prayers.

IN GENERAL:

Mass in Time of Pandemic -

- The Mass formulary In Time of Pandemic sent in 2020 from the Secretariat for Divine Worship is available in English and Spanish. The usual guidelines for the use of Masses for Various Needs and Occasions apply to this Mass. The rubric at the beginning of the Mass indicates days when it may not be used; otherwise, permission for its use is generous. The Mass formulary can be found at this [link](#).

Easter -

- All capacity numbers for any church must be strictly enforced.
- Musicians must be masked and maintain six feet of physical distance from each other:
 - Singers / cantors can be used IF they are able to remain 10- 12 feet apart in all directions.
 - No brass or wood wind instruments may be used.
 - String and percussion instruments, organ and keyboard may be used.



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- Parishes must reiterate guidelines and requirements in advance of the Triduum and Easter Masses and throughout the season as many visitors who might not know the protocols will be present. Ensure your protocols are easily discovered on your parish website homepage and social media channels as visitors search for Easter Mass times.
 - Ads in local papers and working with civic and community organizations to share your guidelines may also be helpful.
- Prepare for the need to enlist and train more volunteers.
- It is critical to foster an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality. As parishioners invite family and friends who do not regularly attend Mass or practice the faith to join them for Easter Masses, during this time of suffering, having well-trained greeters/ushers is of utmost importance.
- Other sites within the parish campus may be used for overflow, with livestream (e.g., parish halls, gymnasium, etc.) but the following must be observed:
 - All protocols in the overflow site must match those in the church (e.g., number of ushers, volunteers to sanitize hands, use of masks and social distancing, etc.)
 - Following the celebration, release by site will need to be regulated: One site dismisses at a time (e.g., the Church empties first, then the parish hall) to avoid bottlenecks of parishioners at exits.
 - Both sites need to be on the same campus/church grounds.
- Parishes are encouraged to livestream, allowing people, especially the most vulnerable, to participate remotely.

Dispensation from Sunday Obligation -

- Due to the pandemic the dispensation from the obligation of Sunday and Holy Day Masses for all Catholics within the Diocese of Belleville remains in force. Those faithful initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist who are unable to participate in-person are encouraged to participate via livestream/broadcast and offer an Act of Spiritual Communion, in union with the entire People of God in the Diocese and throughout the world in this time of stress and difficulty.
- A list of parishes in the diocese livestreaming Masses can be found at this [link](#).

Retaining Reservation Records -

- The state recommends copies of reservation lists from Mass or any event be maintained for a minimum of 28 days. This will enable the church and state/local health officials to contact the participants in the event or exposure to COVID-19.

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