



DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC RESPONSE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

IN LIGHT OF ALL THE PRECAUTIONS IN PLACE, WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The mission of the Church continues! Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, should also continue and even increase: (1) pray for those who are ill, their loved ones, those who care for them, and all who are working tirelessly to respond to the coronavirus, (2) offer up whatever you may have to go without, (3) do what you can to reach out to those who are in need and stay connected to them.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS FOR MASS ARE SUSPENDED:

HOW CAN I STILL PARTICIPATE IN THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS?

Daily Mass will be live streamed at 12 Noon each day from the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on www.youtube.com/syrdio. Sunday Mass airs each week; times located at syrdio.org. Make a Spiritual Communion by praying: ***My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.***

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER MAY STILL TAKE PLACE?

Devotions that can be done privately at home or in churches, but not in public gatherings (e.g., viewing the celebration of Mass and making a Spiritual Communion, reciting the Rosary, meditating on the Scriptures, saying the Divine Mercy Chaplet, making the Stations of the Cross, adoring the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, etc.). For more, check out *Resources for Caring for Our Spiritual and Sacramental Lives When Public Gatherings Are Suspended* at syrdio.org.

CAN CHURCHES REMAIN OPEN?

Yes, for the private prayer and devotions of the faithful. A frequent thorough cleaning of the spaces used is to take place.

WHO MAY ATTEND A PRIEST'S "PRIVATE MASS?"

Priest celebrant, concelebrants, deacon, server, lector, parish staff, not to exceed the number of people recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

WHAT ABOUT MASS INTENTIONS?

If the private Masses of priests do not fulfill all scheduled Mass intentions at the parish, they must either be rescheduled for a later time or combined into a collective Mass intention. Priests may celebrate one Mass for the intentions of several donors when: (1) the faithful knowingly and voluntarily agree to have their intentions combined (i.e., call and ask them), (2) the date, time, and place of the celebration is publicly announced (e.g. parish website), (3) such celebrations occur no more than twice a week in any church, and (4) the celebrant retains only one offering (Congregation for the Clergy, decree *Mos iugiter*, February 22, 1991: AAS 83 (1991) 443-446; English translation in *Origins* 20/43 (April 4, 1991) 705-707).

WHAT ABOUT MASS OFFERINGS?

The faithful are encouraged – as they are able – to continue supporting their parishes financially by dropping off or mailing their Sunday offering to the parish office, via online giving (if available), by saving their contributions until the celebration of public Masses resumes.

MAY HOLY COMMUNION BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE FAITHFUL?

Only within the context of the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass as well as visits to the habitually homebound, sick, and dying. Not within the context of other devotions (e.g. Stations of the Cross) or indiscriminately (e.g., at the door of the church, rectory, or parish office, in a parking lot for the faithful to drive through and pick up, etc.). “Christ the Lord ‘is offered in the sacrifice of the Mass when he becomes present sacramentally as the spiritual food of the faithful under the appearance of bread and wine’” (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, 2). “In receiving the body and blood of Christ, the sick are united sacramentally to the Lord and are reunited with the eucharistic community from which illness has separated them” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 51).

Currently, public gatherings are not permitted and, therefore, Holy Communion should only be distributed as viaticum to those in danger of death.

WHAT ABOUT R.C.I.A.?

Formation for the Elect may continue in on-line venues. The public celebration of the Scrutinies is suspended and the elect are dispensed from two of them at this time by Bishop Lucia. Therefore, at least one of them must be celebrated when public gatherings resume, before the Sacraments of Initiation are received.

WHAT ABOUT WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS?

They are permitted but only in the presence of the ministers of the liturgy and immediate family not to exceed the number of people recommended by the CDC.

In accordance with the most recent Executive Order from the Governor’s office (effective 21 March 2020 beginning at 8:00 PM) immediate family are permitted to gather at the funeral home (by way of extension, the church) for a private viewing/ceremony (e.g., Mass). Moreover, the Department of Health recommends that disposition of the body take place now but will allow the family to wait if proper storage is available. Furthermore, the Cemetery Association has said that family members may be present at committals and graveside services.

WHAT ABOUT HOLY WEEK AND EASTER?

See, Diocese of Syracuse, *Instructions for the Celebration of Holy Week 2020*.

WHAT ABOUT THE EASTER DUTIES: CONFESSION AND COMMUNION?

Among the precepts of the Church are the duties to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, during the Easter season (can. 920) and to confess grave sins at least once a year (can. 989). These precepts often go together because in order to receive Holy Communion, one must be in a “state of grace,” that is free from grave sin (can. 916). Thus, they are called the “Easter duties.” In the United States, the Easter duties may be fulfilled at anytime between the First Sunday of Lent (1 March 2020) and Trinity Sunday (7 June 2020). When it is impossible for those who have not already done so to fulfill these duties, they are suspended. Therefore, there is no obligation to fulfill them during the Easter season, unless and until public gatherings for Mass and prayer resume.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS FOR PRAYER ARE SUSPENDED:

WHAT ABOUT BAPTISM?

They should be postponed, but are currently permitted, only in the presence of immediate family. Fresh water is to be used and fonts are to be cleaned before and after every Baptism.

HOW CAN THE FAITHFUL PRAY THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS AT CHURCH?

Privately, with the assistance of devotional materials that are available for individual use only. For example, devotional booklets may not be reused by other individuals.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT?

- (1) Leave the church open and allow the faithful to enter and pray before the tabernacle.
- (2) Expose the Blessed Sacrament in the church in the ciborium observing the proper norms (by priest, deacon, acolyte, special minister of communion, member of a religious community or lay association devoted to eucharistic adoration, using proper vestments, with two lighted candles, and with at least one person present for the duration of Exposition) (*HCWEOM*, 82 and ff.).
- (3) Expose the Blessed Sacrament in the church in the monstrance observing the proper norms (by priest, deacon, acolyte, special minister of communion, member of a religious community or lay association devoted to eucharistic adoration, using proper vestments, with four to six lighted candles, and incense, and with at least one person present for the duration of Exposition) (*HCWEOM*, 82 and ff.).

Note: Benediction is given only by a priest or deacon after a period of adoration, in the presence of some faithful, and according to the Rite. Otherwise, the Eucharist is simply reposed.

Note: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is not to be done in such a way that it constitutes a public gathering. Rather, it may be done within the context of time for private prayer.

PUBLIC GATHERINGS FOR FAITH FORMATION ARE SUSPENDED:

WHAT ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS?

Faith formation classes are cancelled in conjunction with the precautionary measures taken by local school districts. Pastors and parish catechetical leaders should determine any alternatives (e.g., postponing class, sending materials/resources home, etc.) and communicate them to families. It is strongly recommended that formation take place at home.

WHAT ABOUT FIRST COMMUNION?

As long as public Masses are cancelled, celebrations of First Holy Communion are not able to take place. Pastors and catechetical leaders may decide to reschedule them for a later date or to allow children to receive their First Communion during regularly scheduled Masses when the public celebration of Mass resumes. Preparation may continue in other ways (e.g., remotely, at home).

WHEN AND HOW WILL FIRST COMMUNION RESUME?

At the discretion of the pastor, either in groups as previously scheduled or individually at Sunday Masses

WHAT ABOUT FIRST COMMUNION PREP?

Certain elements of preparation are required (see attached for guidance)

WHAT ABOUT CONFIRMATION?

As long as public Masses are cancelled, celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation are not able to take place. Options for rescheduling them will be available at a later time through Bishop Lucia's office. Preparation may continue in other ways (e.g., remotely, at home).

WHEN AND HOW WILL CONFIRMATIONS RESUME WHEN PUBLIC MASSES RESUME?

TBD

WHAT ABOUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CONFIRMATION PREP?

Parish program "requirements" (i.e., retreats, service hours) may be dispensed this year or other avenues may be pursued (see attached for suggestions)

WHAT ABOUT MARRIAGE PREP?

Preparation may continue remotely or in ways that are consistent with the CDC's guidelines for public gatherings (e.g., a meeting between the individual parties and the priest and/or couple(s) preparing them).

PUBLIC GATHERINGS FOR CERTAIN PARISH ACTIVITIES ARE SUSPENDED:

WHAT DO THOSE INCLUDE?

Any significant public gathering over the number of people recommended by the CDC. For example, Lenten activities (e.g., parish missions, bible studies, soup suppers, Penance services), funeral receptions, etc. Small meetings / gatherings are still permitted at this time. Pastors are to use their discretion.

ARE LENTEN FISH FRIES PERMITTED?

Only those take-out options are permitted per the State's closing of public restaurants.

WHAT ABOUT PARISH MINISTRIES?

Certain parish ministries may need to be suspended (e.g., second-hand stores). Others should continue their outreach, but with necessary precautions in place and/or on a limited basis (e.g., food pantries). Exercise caution (e.g., the vulnerable should not serve – over 60, underlying medical conditions) and use creativity (e.g., delivery, pick-up, etc.).

WHAT ABOUT THE PUBLIC USE OF PARISH AND/OR SCHOOL BUILDINGS?

When deciding whether to permit or prohibit facility use, pastors, principals, etc. are to use discretion and follow the guidelines of the CDC.

PRIESTS ARE ASKED TO REMAIN AVAILABLE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS:

WHICH SACRAMENTS?

Baptism, Penance and Reconciliation (individual confessions, not general absolution), bringing Viaticum to the dying, Matrimony, funerals, Sacraments of Initiation in danger of death.

WHICH PRIESTS ARE NOT ENCOURAGED / ABLE TO MINISTER IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES (E.G., TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND)?

Those who are vulnerable to the Coronavirus – over 60, with chronic illness(es), and/or autoimmune deficiencies.

CAN THEY VISIT HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES?

In many cases, no. Hospitals are currently not allowing priests who have not been properly fitted for protective masks to visit under any circumstances. Provisions are being made for a priest to be available / on-call to tend to the sick and dying at each hospital.

WHEN SHOULD I ASK THEM FOR ASSISTANCE?

Certainly, in emergency situations and in danger of death. Also, when in need of legitimate pastoral care. Please be advised that due to the age and condition of many of the priests of the Diocese of Syracuse, availability may be limited.

CAN THEY IMPART GENERAL ABSOLUTION?

No. The current conditions do not allow for the valid reception of general absolution (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 961).

First, it is important to remember the many ways that God forgives our sins. After Baptism, venial sins are not only forgiven by going to confession, but also when we celebrate the Eucharist, when we make an examination of conscience and, with true sorrow for them, recite an Act of Contrition (ask God for forgiveness), and when we do charitable works ("Charity covers a multitude of sin" - St. Paul). Mortal sins, however, are only forgiven by going to confession. Anyone who has committed a mortal sin can and should call a priest and make an appointment for confession. The priests of the Diocese of Syracuse, if they are able, will honor these requests. Both Pope Francis and Bishop Lucia have encouraged them to remain close to the people at this time, taking the necessary precautions.

Second, priests are only able to grant general absolution: (1) in danger of death, (2) when there is not enough time, and (3) there are not enough confessors for individual confession. Likewise, in situations of grave necessity, they can grant general absolution (c. 961 §1, 1°, 2°). At this time, the conditions do not constitute a "grave necessity." The opportunities to confess sins within a month either by going to a church that is open for individual confessions or by making an appointment with a priest are still available. Moreover, even if general absolution is granted, the faithful are required to confess their sins individually when the pandemic ends and the situation returns to normal (c. 962).

SO, WHAT SHOULD THEY DO?

Remind the faithful that when they find themselves in the “painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution... perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1452).”

SHOULD THEY BRING VIATICUM TO THE DYING?

Yes- taking necessary precautions.

WHAT INSTRUMENTS CAN BE USED IN THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

Cotton swabs. Other people (deacons, nurses, etc.) are not “instruments.” Only the priest can validly anoint a sick person, that is, pray the formula while performing the action. In some cases, the priest may not be able to do this. When this occurs, the priest should pray with the sick person from a distance, reminding them that “perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by *votum confessionis*, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1452).” Moreover, they should call the chancery to ascertain whether they are in a situation in which general absolution may be given.

HOW ARE THEY TO DISPOSE OF INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

Cotton swabs used to anoint the sick are to be burned (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 22).

NOTE: These questions and answers are not exhaustive and, therefore, will be updated regularly. Also, when making decisions at the parish level, pastors and those who collaborate in their ministry should use discretion, following the mandates or guidelines of government authorities and the Diocese of Syracuse. Priests, deacons, and lay ministers are encouraged to be creative in their pastoral efforts. However, care is to be taken to ensure that what is being done, particularly, sacramentally is valid. Contact the Office of Liturgy (cseibt@syrdio.org) with ideas, questions, etc.