



+July 22, 2020

Dear Priests and Parish Leadership,

I hope you have been able to enjoy some well-deserved rest and recreation this summer. These past few months have certainly been hectic for all of us. I want to sincerely thank you for your tremendous efforts to provide a safe and healthy environment for your parishioners. Your cooperation, feedback and willingness to comply demonstrate your care for your people and your communion with the local Church.

The threat of this pandemic continues to be serious. Your diligence to the protocols and safety precautions has prevented the spread of coronavirus throughout our parish communities. We have had multiple positive cases in our parishes, but due to the careful planning and execution by you and your team, we've been able to successfully prevent the spread. Similarly, many of our priests have continued to anoint people known to have COVID-19 and none of them has tested positive. This is evidence that our protocols are effective and why we never cut corners with them. Thank you for upholding them so attentively.

We've been celebrating Mass and other liturgies with the new guidelines for about three months. During this time, the scientific community has learned more about the nuances of the coronavirus. In the early days great attention was placed on surface contact, while recent reports focus on the air borne nature of the virus resulting in more emphasis on mask wearing and physical distancing. Due to this deepened understanding of the virus and experience we've had with liturgical celebrations, we are issuing revised protocols for public Mass celebrations:

- **Presider must wear a mask.**

This change is important. We not only want to protect our priests from contracting the virus or inadvertently passing it on, but we also want to model our expectations for the people in the pews. Masks are a key way we can stop the spread of the virus and must be worn throughout the Mass. The presider may remove his mask while he is speaking, but must replace it while sitting and while handing out Communion.

- **Communion will be distributed to the faithful in the context of the liturgy.**

The distribution of the Eucharist will now move from the end of Mass to its usual position in the Mass. All Eucharistic ministers must wash their hands prior to Mass and wear a mask the entire duration of Mass. During Communion, each Eucharistic minister must have a hand sanitizing station available should they make contact with someone's hand. Everyone wishing to receive must approach wearing a mask and may only remove the mask when they are next in the Communion line. Once they've consumed the Host, they must put their mask on and return to their pew.

- **Processions**

If the presider is wearing a mask, then entrance and recessional processions may return to the Mass.

Please ensure physical distancing of six feet during any procession.

- **Dismissal Protocols**

Physical distancing must be kept throughout the Mass and after its conclusion. With Communion returning to its usual position, people will now be in the pews at the end of Mass. This requires a new dismissal protocol to ensure people safely exit the building. We recommend that you have ushers dismiss people from the rear pews first and then move towards the front. Once you have determined the right protocol for your specific location, please be sure to announce this change at the beginning of Mass so people are aware and prepared for it.

In addition to the changes in the liturgy, the coronavirus taskforce discussed other revisions:

- **Registration System for Contact Tracing**

Registration systems are important to help calculate the appropriate number of people per the capacity of each parish. They are also useful in giving ushers a sense of the number of groups vs individuals, which is helpful when placing families in pews. In addition, these systems are helpful for contact tracing efforts should there be an exposure at Mass. However, the Governor's guidance around record retention has changed. Therefore it is no longer a *requirement* to keep attendance logs for 2 weeks. Instead, it is *highly encouraged* as a way to alert people to a potential exposure and help save lives.

- **Reopening Addendums**

Given the increasing number of coronavirus cases across the state, there is a real possibility that counties may revert to an earlier phase in Governor Inslee's Washington Safe Start strategy. We encourage each parish to be prepared and plan for this potential. What would an outdoor Mass look like for your parish? Would it be possible in the winter time? Please think through these scenarios now, keeping in mind that livestreaming Mass should continue. Instead of rewriting your reopening plans, please just submit an addendum to the vetting committee at SeattleMass2020@seattlearch.org.

Again, I want to express my gratitude to you and your teams for everything you're doing during this time. This experience is especially taxing on all of us and your efforts are greatly appreciated. I continue to pray for you and I ask that you continue to pray for everyone impacted by COVID-19.

Thank you for your diligence in these matters.

With every best wish and an assurance of prayer, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

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Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg