

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

Protocol for Reopening with Social Distancing and Precautions to Prevent the Transmission of COVID-19

Revision 6/6/20

General Considerations

The recent lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 caused by the coronavirus is an unprecedented event in our lifetimes. Whether compelled by work to go out and face perceived risks or compelled to stay home without work and without church, for many people these imposed behaviors are contributing to stress and frustration. Because it is possible that changing the procedures for attending church may add to the stress and complicate a person's return to worship, it is important that everyone participating in reopening the church makes time to pray and to prepare to meet people pastorally where they are, even, and especially, in situations where we are asking them to change behaviors or long-practiced habits. A person's relationships with God and with the Church are often very personal and can be very strongly held. An effort requiring change may perturb people returning to church and handling these situations using a consoling approach rather than a confrontational one will be important for the well-being of the community, the individual being asked to change, and the person asking for the change. With focus on God and the mission of the gospel to which we are called by Baptism, we can together pass through this trial. The Holy Spirit is in our midst at each step, even when we may be too frustrated to realize it. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are freely given to us to be used for our salvation. This is a time to be especially aware of which gifts are yours and to draw upon them in the best possible way.

In this pastoral spirit, these guidelines and procedures are being put in place to permit worship in the common space that is our Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Albany. May God guide us at each decision to choose well and to care for one another. May we have the courage to make good and right decisions, and to carry them out. May we accomplish our work with the love that announces the gospel to the world, by the work of our hands. Whenever we are called upon to police these procedures, remember to do it in the spirit of Jesus' advice in the gospel, first to quietly ask and only afterward to resort to more serious measures. Anyone undertaking to correct a person not following the procedures may ask for assistance from clergy or staff at the Cathedral.

The various volunteers and ministers have many tasks to accomplish and each person will be (and will be required to be) trained for these tasks. We will communicate changed procedures to people attending Mass before their entrance into the church so that they are better prepared for the changes that will be found inside. To our volunteers and staff, thank you for the effort you are undertaking to make this effort successful and to keep our worshipping community safe. May God bless you in these activities and always.

Entry

Entry for Mass will be only through the transept doors. These doors are handicap accessible and will permit the area near the baptismal font to be cordoned off, reducing the sanitizing work to be done between Masses. The doors on Eagle Street will be closed and locked. The restrooms will be closed except for emergencies and stalls to be used for emergencies will be marked. Traffic at entry will flow

according to the pattern shown in the reopening diagram. People should be guided to enter pews in the main nave from the side aisles, avoiding unnecessary traffic around the building.

The transept doors will be opened so that people can travel in and out without physically touching the doors. If this situation is too tempting for the pigeons, then one set of doors will be closed, or a different arrangement to keep the pigeons out will need to be identified.

A log (the "Attendance and Seating Log") will be available at the doors where two ushers are stationed. Once people are welcomed as they enter the church, the names of every person entering will be recorded in the log. The pen used to record names will be sanitized between uses by different household units. A second usher will escort people to their seats, which pew number shall be recorded in the log. If a positive COVID-19 case occurs among the Cathedral community that requires contact tracing, these logs will provide the information necessary for that task. The logs will be collected after each Mass and kept in a binder in the parish office.

Single-use worship aids will be available on tables at the entrance doors. All people should wear masks from before entering the Cathedral until after leaving it, except at the time they consume the Sacrament.

Seating

Each pew in the church, closed and open, will be numbered to record seating arrangements in the Attendance and Seating Log. Available seating is in every other pew, starting from the second pew, which ensures the necessary social distancing in the aisles across the front of the pews. Pews that are available for seating will be marked by 1" blue Nylon flat webbing. Pews that are not open for seating will be marked by 1" red Nylon flat webbing. Because sitting within 6' of the aisles is not permitted, in order to ensure social distancing for the aisles, seating is only permitted in the center area of the pew, which will be marked by 2" diameter light blue circle stickers. Most of the center pews are 19' long, permitting 7' of seating in each open pew. Side pews are 10' long, permitting seating in the 4' closest to the church wall. In the transept pews seating will also be marked for center seating only, as shown in the reopening diagram. To maximize social distancing and to limit the amount of sanitizing, people should sit in every fourth pew until the number of people present require seating in the available pews between. It is also beneficial to have similar numbers of pews occupied on both sides of the church to facilitate communion.

As the open pews are occupied, the blue Nylon webbing should be removed from both ends of the pew and placed on the seat of the pew in front. This will make it easy to identify what pews have been used during the Mass. Removing the webbing reduces the chance that a person sitting in the pew will replace the webbing out of kindness for returning the pew to the way they found it, which would result in the pew not being sanitized after Mass.

Once seated, parishioners should not move about the church. If a parishioner wants a votive candle lit at the side altars, they can ask an usher, who can make the necessary arrangements with the sacristan to have a candle placed in the side altar and lit.

Offertory / Collection

Due to the length of the pews in the Cathedral, there is no practical way to take a collection at the normal time during mass and maintain appropriate distancing between people. Instead, the collection will be taken as people leave the church after Mass. At the offertory the sacristans (or ushers if no sacristans are present) will remove the stack of unused worship aids from the entrance tables. A basket for the collection, and a container to collect used worship aids, each appropriately marked, will be placed on the tables for use at the end of Mass.

Communion

Priests and deacons will wear masks when distributing communion. There will be four communion stations: two at the front of the main aisle, at least six feet apart and six feet away from the column at the corner and one in front of each transept section, at least six feet away from the column at the corner. Near the corner at each side of the church, small tables will be placed for using during communion as described in the following paragraph. A paten will also be placed here in case the sacrament is dropped on the floor. Each family or household unit must maintain social distance from the family unit in front of them in line when receiving communion. Aisles will be marked to facilitate this distancing. Members of an individual family or household unit need not separate within their household or family unit.

The protocol for communion will be to distribute to the transepts first, and then to those coming forward in the main aisle. This method permits the convenient flow of traffic in the main part of the church which follows. Whenever possible, communion will be most effectively distributed by two ministers and when a deacon cannot be present, it will be helpful if any second priest at the rectory will come to the Cathedral to assist with communion. On the small tables described above, there should be hand sanitizer and a paten. The paten is necessary in case Holy Communion is dropped on the floor. It can be picked up by the person who dropped it and placed in the paten on the table. After communion, and of the sacrament that was dropped will be placed in the tabernacle on the paten and properly dealt with after Mass. The sanitizer is available if, during communion, the priest or deacon makes contact with someone receiving and needs to sanitize their hands. If a person receives communion on the tongue, the priest or deacon will sanitize their hands immediately afterward and before distributing to anyone else.

After the priest receives at the Altar, those who will distribute go first to the two stations serving the transepts. Two ushers (one in each transept) will, while maintaining social distance and reminding people to keep their masks in place, guide those in the transepts to come forward to receive communion according to the traffic pattern in the Reopening Diagram, starting with the pews closest to the altar and moving toward the pews farthest from the altar. At the same time those in the transept begin coming forward for communion, two other ushers will, from near the sanctuary and moving toward the back, go down the side aisle, also maintaining social distancing, and invite those who wish to receive from the side pews to leave their pews, pass down the side aisle toward the gathering space, and then come forward in the main aisle in two lines close to the pews on each side of the aisle. Two other ushers at the back of the main aisle will guide family units to keep staggered in the main aisle

helping to maintain additional social distance. The main aisle is 7' wide, but the additional distance afforded by staggering will improve the factor of safety.

Once the side aisles are empty, the two ushers at the back of the main aisle will move from the back of the church toward the front, inviting those in the central pews to come forward in the main aisle for communion, returning to their pews in the normal way, down the side aisles, maintaining social distance both coming forward and returning. Ushers should try to stagger the family and household units coming forward from each side of the church. In each section (transepts and main church), ushers will receive communion last. This will be an indicator to the ministers that they can move to the next station or return to the sanctuary. If the lines are different length, people should not cross from one line to another – they should remain on the side of the church where they were seated. Although this may increase the length of Mass by a small amount of time, permitting people to cross sides of the church will create traffic confusion that should be avoided.

To receive Holy Communion, individuals will approach the minister with masks on their faces, receiving communion preferably in their hands. They will step to the column at the corner, which will be at least six feet away from where they received communion, remove their mask, and consume the Sacrament. They will then replace their mask and return to their seat. If an individual approaches to receive on the tongue, the priest or deacon will sanitize their hands immediately afterward at the sanitizing station on the nearby table, and before continuing to distribute communion. While we want to avoid giving an impression that the person who received on the tongue is presumed sick, safe hygiene in the current circumstance makes wise this precautionary step necessary. The priest or deacon should also sanitize their hands anytime they become aware of physical contact with a person as the Sacrament is being communicated.

Following communion, ushers should proceed to their stations for dismissal from the church. Two ushers will station themselves behind the table near the door to manage the exiting traffic at the doorway and to watch the collection basket. Two ushers will position themselves at the last occupied pew in each transept (closest to the door). Two ushers will be stationed in the side aisles at the front-most occupied pews in the main part of the church.

Departure

At the conclusion of the St. Michael prayer, and before the recessional begins, either the priest, deacon or cantor will make a reminding announcement about dismissal from the church so that it can be orderly. This announcement will follow a script written for the purpose. When the recessional begins, the priest and deacon will reverence the Altar and return to the sacristy. Once departed, the transept ushers may dismiss from the transept pews, starting at those closest to the door and leaving sufficient time between pews to allow for social distancing. After the transepts are dismissed, the ushers in the two side aisles will move from the front of the aisle toward the gathering space at the back of the church, dismissing from both the side pews and the main pews, into the side aisle, and toward the transept doors, also allowing sufficient space between family or household units. Everyone in the church should exit from the transept door on the side of the church where they were sitting. If there are people who need to leave by a door on the opposite side of the church, they should remain in the pew until the church has been emptied and then proceed to the opposite transept door and exit the church.

No one should depart from the Eagle Street doors to reduce the amount of cleaning and sanitizing that must be completed between Masses. If people choose to remain in their pew for individual prayer, the ushers can continue to the next pew. It is important to permit people time to pray if they wish, so long as sanitizing can still be completed before the next Mass.

The collection baskets will be on the table near the doors. Parishioners can drop their offertory in the baskets. There will also be a bin for collecting worship aids to be recycled. Worship aids must not be reused, and the bin will be collected by sacristans wearing gloves. They will also collect the collection baskets in the same way. The collection should not be left unattended at any time.

Sanitizing

Following every Mass, the church needs to be sanitized using appropriate cleaners. The volunteers who participate in sanitizing will be provided Nitrile gloves (to prevent the risk of a latex allergic reaction), rags or towels, and sanitizing solution in buckets or spray bottles, and a garbage bag. The following items need to be sanitized and wiped down:

- Every pew that was used, seat, back, kneeler, and front, including over the top where people likely rest their hands.
- The very end of every pew because it may have been touched as people passed up and down the aisles.
- The front of the front pew in each section where people may have put their hands when walking across the front aisles.
- The line that is across the end of the pew (both closed and open pews.)
- When a pew is sanitized, begin on one end, placing the blue or gold line back across the end of the pew, and then move across toward the other end of the pew. When the pew is sanitized, replace the blue or gold line across the second end of the pew. This will mark the pew as sanitized.
- The doorknobs and crash bars at both transept entrances (inside and out on both the exterior and interior doors).
- The railings at the sanctuary steps.
- The tables at the doors where the collection station and worship aid handout/collection are accomplished.
- Choir stall for the lector
- Cantor stand, chair, kneeler, and microphone
- High pulpit railing and bookstand.

To ensure that all items are sanitized, a checklist will be used and marked off for each section of the church.

Restroom Use

Under normal circumstances, the restrooms will be closed and not used. Because emergencies may occur that require a restroom, two Ushers will be stationed at the back of the pews in the church

where someone may let an usher know they need to use the restroom. Instructions for self-sanitizing the stall and bathroom fixtures will be posted in the restroom. The usher will also give the person a red circle sticker to place on the stall door of the stall that is used. The stall will be closed for further use until it can be properly cleaned and sanitized by trained cleaning staff.