

The bishop of Trenton, Most Reverend David O'Connell, has issued to the parishes of the diocese new guidelines pertaining to the celebration of Mass and Sacraments in a Time of Pandemic. Because we are still in a time of pandemic, any celebration is to be done with limited attendance. I have extracted the key points of his message, and they are listed for you.

In the upcoming days I will meet with my parish staff to discuss how St. Clement's can implement these new directives. We will do our best to ensure that you have efficient and effective access to the sacraments. This will take planning, and some adjustments to the administration of the sacraments will probably be needed as we return to parish life. My goal is to accommodate all of our parishioners who wish to participate in the sacraments. However, because this is a new experience for us, it is important that we all be patient, understanding, and flexible.

After I have met with my staff, I will then post guidelines for the celebration of Mass and sacraments at St. Clement's. Your patience and understanding are greatly appreciated at this time. Like you, I look forward to celebrating the sacraments with our community again.

May God bless you,
Fr. Thomas

COVID 19 is still a virulent contagious virus communicated between people. Everyone should remain conscious and alert that risks to either contract or spread the disease remain possible at any gathering of people, indoors or outdoors. The risk is considered by public health experts to be especially significant indoors at prolonged, sedentary gatherings where coughing, sneezing and even talking/singing could easily communicate the coronavirus.

Those who are frightened, those with a COVID 19 diagnosis or symptoms, those who may be asymptomatic carriers, those not feeling well, those with underlying health conditions or those in a high risk category should avoid public gatherings of any kind whether indoors or outdoors.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, I have been entrusted by the Church with the responsibility to exercise care for the spiritual needs of the faithful. I cannot do that effectively if I ignore their physical health and well-being or put that health and the common good at risk. For that reason, heeding the advice of public health officials and other scientific data, I directed the clergy and faithful of the Diocese to follow the courses of action we have pursued for the past several months.

The Catholic faithful, however, need the Eucharist for their spiritual health and well-being. It is an essential part of Catholic life and we cannot continue to do without the Eucharist and other sacraments indefinitely. The COVID 19 pandemic introduced temporary yet necessary sacrifices into our lives as Catholics. The faithful have carried the accompanying spiritual burdens heroically. Our clergy and I have shared those burdens, too, deprived as we have been of the opportunity to exercise many of the pastoral and liturgical ministries for which we have been ordained as bishop, priests and deacons. It has been our common goal during this pandemic to minister as best we could in the hope that the gradual restoration of full Catholic life would occur as soon as possible.

A dispensation from Sunday/Holy Day obligation has been granted so that the faithful could "stay home" in good conscience.

Balancing the physical, public health precautions deemed necessary with the spiritual good of

the faithful, I have decided to resume limited opportunities for the faithful to return to their parish churches, while maintaining the necessary, required public health precautions present in the CDC Guidelines, as the Diocese gradually and safely moves toward the full restoration of Catholic spiritual and sacramental life

Common Directives to be Observed by All Parishes Until Further Notice

The dispensation from Sunday/Holy Day Mass obligation remains in effect until Monday, September 7 (unless otherwise announced). The fulfillment of the Easter Duty may be accomplished before the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020.

Parish churches may begin the celebration of limited “in church” public weekend Masses --- with no more than 1/3 occupancy --- on June 13-14, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, observing all requirements listed below.

Weekday “in church” public Masses --- with no more than 25 persons attending --- may begin on Monday, June 8, 2020, observing the same requirements. Pastors will determine the most fair and effective ways to ensure proper observance of those numbers.

Those who are hesitant or fearful because of COVID 19 concerns as well as those with a COVID 19 diagnosis or symptoms, those who may be asymptomatic carriers, those not feeling well, those with underlying health conditions or those in a high risk category should stay home and avoid any public gathering.

A single entrance to the church should be utilized to monitor the number of people attending. All doors can be used for exiting church. Pastors and their staffs should devise a plan for an orderly exit from the church, eg., dismissal pew by pew. Receptacles for parish offerings/collections should be placed at the entrance and all exits. Parishioners should be made aware and reminded of the presence of these receptacles and of on-line opportunities to support their parish in this time of special need.

Live-streaming of Masses shall continue, as determined by pastors. Group devotional observances, including Children’s Liturgy of the Word and parish social gatherings are suspended until further notice.

No public gatherings or greetings before or after Masses, at church entrances/exits or on parish property are permitted.

All missals, hymnals, printed materials, pamphlets, etc., must be removed from churches.

Holy Water fonts or receptacles are to remain empty.

Masks must be worn at all indoor/outdoor public Masses; regular hand washing with soap/water or alcohol-based sanitizer brought from home should take place; social distancing (6 feet) between groups of people from the same household and any other groups/individuals and between single individuals must be maintained at all indoor/outdoor Masses. Marking off pews is recommended.

The usual presentation of offertory gifts and physical contact of any kind at the sign of peace is prohibited.

Communion in the hand is strongly preferred. A dispensation is granted for Communion in the hand for Masses in the Extraordinary Form. Where Communion is given on the tongue, the priest must sanitize hands between communicants.

Priests will not receive or gather the faithful after the Mass.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, confession continues to be available as needed.

Confessionals should not be used.

Outdoor confessions are permitted, even encouraged.

For indoor confessions, a well-ventilated area should be used that would allow for social distancing.

All arrangements for confessions must safeguard the health of both priest and penitent

Final Remarks

As with the celebration of public “in Church” Masses, parishes not ready or able to meet the preceding requirements for administration of the sacraments should postpone them until they are ready or able. The pastor is to make that determination.

Recognizing that it is impossible to anticipate every question or conceivable parish scenario, priests are directed to use good pastoral judgment and common sense in such situations, while observing these directives.

These preceding directives are temporary and remain in effect until rescinded by the Bishop.

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Approved by:

Most Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M., J.C.D.,

Bishop of Trenton

May 29, 2020