



CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* JACKSON

Updated Protocols during the Pandemic Updated as of May 18, 2021

In light of the recent updated guidelines issued by the CDC, especially regarding the CDC statements regarding masks and vaccinated individuals, we are updating our protocols for Masses and other gatherings at parishes in the Diocese of Jackson. We continue to advise the pastors, lay ecclesial ministers, and parish leaders to decide with prudence and care the best way to implement these policies and norms in the overall reality of the parish community. We continue to emphasize that when implementing these safety protocols, we should all be cognizant of avoiding unnecessary risks.

For Masses:

- Social distancing will be at 3 feet.
- Parish may use every pew, deciding how to stagger seating to maintain 3 feet social distancing.
- Masks are encouraged for those who are not vaccinated and for children and youth under 16 years old. But the families and the individuals may make the decision to use masks considering the risks involved.
- Those individuals who have compromised immune systems and other underlying health conditions may choose to still wear masks and are encouraged to do so.
- The pastors and lay ecclesial ministers should encourage members of the parish to make a decision to wear or not wear a mask at Mass through a prayerful decision and through consideration of the common good of the community.
- The community leaders may decide that a certain area of the church seating be reserved for those wearing masks, taking consideration the physical layout of the church.
- Youth and adults may serve as altar servers. Youth and adult altar servers who are not vaccinated are encouraged to wear masks. When the different prayers are read by the priest during Mass, a book stand should be used rather than using an altar server.
- The parish may resume with the entrance procession and recessional procession down the main aisle.
- We still encourage the faithful to receive Holy Communion in the hand, since this is the safest way to do so during the pandemic. However, if for pastoral reasons the priest decides that he wants to offer Holy Communion on the tongue, he should offer it on the tongue at the end of the communion time, having families come together, and sanitizing after each family unit receives Holy Communion on the tongue. The priest should only give Holy Communion on the tongue if he feels that he can do so safely, protecting the priest and the community. Some priests may decide that it is not prudent to offer Holy Communion on the tongue for safety or logistical reasons.
- We still encourage the congregation not to have offertory collection through the passing of a basket in the pews. Instead, the parish should encourage on-line giving and could have a basket for the offertory in front of the altar and/or at the entrance of the church.
- Hymnals and missalettes may be used in the pews.
- Sanitizing the pews does not have to be as often as before, since the CDC states that the risk from contracting the virus from surfaces is minimal. The community should prudently decide on sanitizing procedures.
- Hand sanitizer should still be used by parishioners upon entrance to the church and should be provided by the parish.

- Bulletins can be handed out to parishioners at Mass, but we also encourage you to email bulletins to parishioners using Flocknote.
- We are discouraging the filling of the holy water font due to safety concerns.
- For parishes who want to start back with choirs, adults in the choirs need to be vaccinated.
- Priests and eucharistic ministers are required to wear masks when distributing Holy Communion.

For meetings, gatherings, parish groups and outside groups, the local community will make the decision as to what it can accommodate in its facilities.

- Awareness of safety protocols needs to be followed when serving meals. Meals should still not be buffet style or self-serve.
- Social distancing should be observed in meetings, a minimum of 3 feet.
- The local community can decide if it is safe and prudent to allow non-parish outside groups to meet in the facilities at this time.
- The local community will decide the sanitizing and cleaning procedures needed at parish facilities.
- At gatherings and when seated at tables, the parish and those present can decide on the safety of taking off masks. Those individuals who have compromised immune systems, those not vaccinated, and those with other underlying health conditions are still encouraged to wear masks at such gatherings even when those vaccinated individuals are not wearing masks. The decision to wear or not wear a mask should be prudently made when considering the risks involved.

Many parishes will be holding events for children and youth during the summer, including youth activities and vacation Bible school. These things should be kept in mind:

- Outdoor activities for children and youth will minimize the risk of exposure.
- Masks are encouraged for children and youth who are not vaccinated. The decision to not wear masks should be made in the spirit of these overall protocols.
- For trips, the risk should be evaluated, knowing that day trips are far safer than overnight trips. A preference should be made for local trips and trips of three hours and less, rather than long-distance trips. There is a lot we can do without traveling a long distance. When planning a trip, safety while using transportation and a plan for dealing with sickness and quarantining if that situation arises needs to be addressed. Keeping everyone safe on any kind of trip and having a contingency plan should be priorities.
- Service projects are feasible, as long as safety procedures and protocols are kept in mind.
- Meals and snacks should not be self-serve or buffet style. Individually wrapped snacks and food items minimize the safety risk.
- When planning such activities for children and youth, keep in mind situations where we can let our guard down, which could create situations of greater risk.

We want to thank all of you for your efforts in keeping our parishioners safe during the pandemic. We acknowledge that all of us are very weary of dealing with the pandemic. We can modify our protocols and procedures as described above to allow more flexibility. However, we acknowledge that this still is not the time to let our guard down completely. We will continue to monitor the situation and will issue modified guidelines when the reality of the pandemic changes.

Blessings to all of you during these challenging times.