

Catholic Diocese of Jackson
Protocols during the Pandemic - Update 22 July 2021

1. In light of the increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Mississippi and throughout the country due to the Delta variant of the virus, it is prudent once again to address our protocols for Masses and other gatherings at parishes in the Diocese of Jackson. As our reality changes, it is wise to look at our protocols and how we are addressing this reality. We continue to advise pastors, lay ecclesial ministers, and parish leaders to decide with prudence and care the best way to implement these directives 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.

2. For Masses:

- Social distancing will be at 3 feet.
- The parish may use every pew, deciding how to stagger seating to maintain 3 feet social distancing.
- Masks are encouraged for those who are vaccinated and need to take precautions due to age or health condition; and for those children, youth, and adults who are not vaccinated. Families and individuals are to make the decision to use masks considering the risks involved, just as they do in other facets of their daily lives.
- Individuals who have compromised immune systems and other underlying health conditions are encouraged to wear masks.
- 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 community's common good.

- Vulnerable individuals or the unvaccinated may find it safer to attend a daily Mass where there is less Mass attendance and more social distancing compared to a weekend Mass. There is still a dispensation in place where attending Mass during the week will count as the weekly Sunday Mass obligation.
- Parish leaders may decide that a certain area of church seating be reserved for those wearing masks, taking into consideration the physical layout of the church.
- Youth and adults may serve as altar servers. Youth and adult altar servers are encouraged to wear masks. For presidential prayers, a book stand should be used rather than using an altar server.
- The parish may decide to maintain the entrance procession and recessional procession down the main aisle taking safety into consideration.
- 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. The priest and the Eucharistic minister who distributes the Eucharist should wear a mask at that time. The Precious Blood should not be offered to communicants.
- An example of announcing the option of communion directly on the tongue: “We distribute communion down the side aisle. Please follow the direction of the ushers. Currently, the norm is to receive communion in the hand, but if you choose to receive communion directly on the tongue, please wait

until all the other communicants on that side have received communion, then you may come at the end of the line. The Eucharistic minister and I will sanitize after each family unit receiving directly on the tongue. Thank you for your cooperation.”

- We still encourage parishes not to have the offertory collection through the passing of baskets in the pews. Instead, the parish should encourage on-line giving and could have a basket for the offertory in visible and appropriate locations in 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 holy water fonts due to safety concerns.
- For parishes who want to start back with choirs, adults in the choirs need to be vaccinated. Priests may decide just to have a cantor instead of a full choir.
- Funerals, weddings, baptisms, and other sacraments, will follow the same directives and protocols for daily and weekend Masses.

3. 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 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.

4. Many parishes are holding events for children and youth during the summer. Religious education classes will commence soon as the school year begins. All of this 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 risks 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. 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. The parish should consider putting meals in a clamshell container for safety reasons.
- 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.

5. Concluding thoughts

- 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. Especially with the Delta variant and with the increase in new cases and hospitalizations, we should not let our guard down, but rather continue to be prudent and careful in all we do.
- Parishes are encouraged to look at the above protocols and to adapt them and make decisions according to the local reality of the community of the parish. Demographics, local COVID cases, vaccination rates, and physicals layouts of parishes vary greatly.
- 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.