

Covid-19 Protocol Instructions for the Diocese of Peoria

Issued May 20, 2020

WARNING ABOUT RISK ASSUMED BY PARISHIONERS:

While our parish staffs will attempt to take appropriate precautions consistent with the advice of public health authorities, parishioners and guests should understand that they assume the risk of contracting COVID-19 anytime they enter a public space since such precautions do not eliminate the risk of infection.

Parishes must post the above warning using the language provided at entrances to the parish church as well as on parish websites and social media accounts.

Introduction

The Archdiocese of Chicago has worked with the Catholic dioceses in Illinois to prepare a program for the reopening of their parishes. The instructions in Chicago respond to the current complex situation regarding rates of infection. This document explains norms in effect in the Diocese of Peoria.

The Archdiocese of Chicago is following a timeline that corresponds to their current rates of infection. They have not yet opened their churches for weddings, baptisms, and funeral with 10 persons present (Phase I). The Diocese of Peoria has already reached Phase I and is preparing for Phase IA, which allows for the opening of churches for private prayer and adoration.

Each diocese in Illinois will issue protocols corresponding to the phase that their various regions are experiencing. Regions within a diocese may vary from place to place as determined by rates of infection. There may be adjustments in the protocols as the situation evolves.

General Principles

When applying these norms, priests and all the faithful should keep in mind the need to be cautious and provide for the safety and health of our parishioners, especially those who are vulnerable.

Local norms that are in force in our region of the State of Illinois must be respected.

Those who are sick or who show signs of illness should not come to church. Those who are in the high-risk population or who are vulnerable should exercise prudence by remaining as safe as possible. The faithful continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. When in doubt, the ill and the elderly should continue to remain at home.

Specific Guidelines

Selection and training of volunteers

Every parish is asked to recruit and train a group of volunteers to assist with the parish reopening plan. Parishes may train separate teams (1) to clean the church, (2) to set up the church, and (3) to serve as greeters. According to local circumstances, parishes may choose to train their volunteers to perform multiple duties. Pastors should organize their volunteers after considering local circumstances.

It is recommended that volunteers be selected from the non-vulnerable population insofar as possible, i.e. those under 65 and without underlying medical conditions. With parental permission, high school students who are under 18 may be permitted to volunteer.

Training will be provided by the Archdiocese of Chicago via webinar (visit <https://www.archchicago.org/coronavirus/reopening-training>). Participants should note that some of the protocols presented in the training have been adapted in the Diocese of Peoria. If, during the implementation of this program, it seems necessary to provide additional information or training, the Diocese of Peoria may arrange for additional resources and training materials to help parishes and volunteers.

General norms about distancing in church buildings open to the public

- Insofar as possible, appropriate distancing should be maintained at all times by all present in the church.
- Parishes should mark their pews in order to maintain appropriate distancing by indicating which pews can be used and which cannot.
- Parishioners sitting in the same pew must also maintain a proper separation from one another. However, family members who live together are permitted to sit next to each other.
- Pastors should consider local circumstances in order to determine how to best to indicate where parishioners should sit and how volunteers can best assist during the distribution of Holy Communion regarding the flow of traffic.
- Volunteers should direct the public not to congregate in the narthex, gathering space, or any other public area at any time.

General precautions to be observed in church buildings open to the public

- All ministers who assist in the liturgy must wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before any liturgy.
- Hand sanitizer must be available for the public who enter a church building. Greeters or ushers should direct the public to sanitize their hands.
- All present in the church are required to wear masks or face coverings. Masks can be removed for those who are able to strictly observe required distancing. For example, a priest, a deacon, a reader, or a cantor may remove his or her mask when they can perform their liturgical duties while maintaining 6 ft. separation from other persons.
- Children under the age of 2 are not required to wear masks.
- Where it is not possible to maintain proper distance, protective equipment must be used.
- Volunteers who interact with the public must wear protective equipment.

Norms for disinfecting churches

- Hand sanitizer must be readily available.
- Churches should be cleaned daily.
- Commonly touched surfaces (including door handles, light switches, hand railings, tops of pews, etc.) in churches are to be disinfected between services using an appropriate disinfectant. This includes commonly touched surfaces in all restrooms open to the public.
- Churches are to be disinfected according to norms established by the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control.

Specific norms for the celebration of Mass

- In Phase I, Mass may be celebrated with a small group of the faithful present for a wedding or a funeral.
- The public celebration of Sunday and weekday Mass is not permitted until we enter Phase II.
- Parishes should consider removing hymnals, missalettes, and any other reusable items. Bulletins may be set out to be picked up by parishioners after Mass.
- Holy water fonts must remain empty.
- It is recommended that doors be propped open, so parishioners do not need to touch door handles to enter or exit the church.
- Insofar as possible, proper distance must be maintained between all persons both when entering and exiting the church.
- For the offertory, collection baskets or locked containers may be set in a convenient place. Collection baskets may not be passed.
- The gift procession is omitted. The ciboria and cruets of water and wine should be placed in the sanctuary.
- The sign of peace is to be omitted entirely.
- The Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the faithful. Only the clergy receive from the chalice.
- Insofar as possible, proper distance is to be maintained during the distribution of Communion. If an aisle is less than 6 ft. wide, communicants should approach in single file, observing proper distancing.
- It is suggested that aisles be managed so all traffic is one-way. Avoid two-way traffic in any aisle if possible.
- In the initial stage of Phase II, only clergy will distribute Communion.
- Ministers distributing Communion must take appropriate safety precautions, wearing appropriate safety equipment. Unless individual local circumstances suggest otherwise, a minister does not need to use a full-face shield when distributing Communion.
- Communion should be distributed by placing the host in the communicant's hand, while carefully avoiding any contact between the minister's hand and the communicant's hand.
- Those who are at risk or uncomfortable can make a Spiritual Communion by prayerfully expressing a desire to be united with Our Lord while not coming forward to receive the Eucharist.

Norms regarding the number of persons admitted during Phase II

- Once public Mass is permitted in Phase II, the Diocese of Peoria will give instructions regarding the number of persons who may be present in the church, after consultation with local civil authorities.
- The number of persons permitted will likely be a percentage of the total capacity of the building. Pastors should prepare for Phase II by calculating the maximum capacity of their churches according to accepted norms. The number of persons permitted should not exceed the number of persons who can attend while observing required proper distancing.
- Ushers should turn away persons who are symptomatic or who refuse to follow safety protocols. Pastors can determine how best to organize the work of their volunteers.
- It is not recommended in the Diocese of Peoria that volunteers call law enforcement to deal with situations of conflict except in the most extreme cases.
- If the pastor can anticipate that more parishioners are likely to attend than the number of persons permitted in his church, a ticket reservation system or another appropriate system will be required to prevent the number of persons from exceeding the permitted limit.
- Before permission for Phase II is given, parishes are encouraged to test a sign-up system for attending Mass (such as Eventbrite.com, Signupgenius.com or similar) if this seems necessary.
- Even after permission is given for the faithful to attend Mass publicly, parishes may wish to continue to broadcast Mass digitally for those at home who cannot or who should not attend.

Norms for opening churches for private prayer

- Permission has not yet been given in the Diocese of Peoria for Phase 1A, the opening of churches for private prayer.
- When permission for Phase 1A is given, the number of persons present in a church for private prayer is limited to 10, with those in attendance observing proper distancing.
- If the pastor can anticipate that more than 10 parishioners are likely to be present for private prayer at any one time, the pastor should prepare a system for limiting the number of persons admitted or controlling the length of their stay to allow others to come to pray.
- Pastors may ask a volunteer to be on site to assist with supervising the church during this time.
- Disinfecting protocols must be observed in churches.

Self-certification of readiness to open

- Churches in the Diocese of Peoria are already at Phase I in which weddings, baptisms, and funerals are permitted with a small number attending.
- The Diocese of Peoria will provide additional documentation at a later date for parishes to verify that they are ready to pass to Phase II.
- Parishes in the Diocese of Peoria will use Certification Forms prepared by the Diocese of Peoria. These will be made available at the appropriate time.

Special norms for baptisms

- All precautionary norms listed above must be followed about maintaining proper distance, washing or sanitizing hands, and wearing safety equipment insofar as possible. Unless individual local circumstances suggest otherwise, a minister does not need to use a full-face shield when baptizing.
- Fresh water must be prepared for each baptism.
- According to the prudent judgment of the priest, it is permitted to prepare two Q-tips in advance for the ritual anointings, one dipped in the Oil of Salvation and the other dipped in the Sacred Chrism. The Q-tips are placed on a glass plate and burned after used.
- The priest must maintain proper distance from family members, both during and after the rite, except for what is strictly necessary to perform the ritual.

Special norms for reconciliation

- All precautionary norms listed above must be followed about maintaining proper distance, washing or sanitizing hands, and wearing safety equipment insofar as possible.
- It is desirable to select a larger room for confessions that allows for proper distancing while also protecting the confidentiality of the Sacrament.
- If face-to-face confessions cannot be heard with proper distancing, then all confessions must take place behind the screen.
- Penitents must maintain proper distancing while waiting to go to confession.
- Sanitizer should be available for each penitent before entering the confessional room.

Special norms for weddings

- All precautionary norms listed above must be followed about maintaining proper distance, washing or sanitizing hands, and wearing safety equipment insofar as possible. Unless individual local circumstances suggest otherwise, a minister does not need to use a full-face shield when witnessing a marriage.
- The celebrant does not touch the rings. Rather, he uses a paten or plate to hand the rings to the bride and groom.
- At a wedding Mass, the gift procession is omitted. The ciboria and cruets of water and wine should be placed in the sanctuary.

Special norms for funerals

- All precautionary norms listed above must be followed about maintaining proper distance, washing or sanitizing hands, and wearing safety equipment insofar as possible.
- The gift procession is omitted. The ciboria and cruets of water and wine should be placed in the sanctuary.

Questions

Please direct your questions to reopen@cdop.org.

For more information and future updates, please visit www.cdop.org/reopen.