Liturgical Protocols for Public Health Safety

As of March 13, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has found no community transmission of COVID-19 in the Diocese of Jefferson City. Nonetheless, the following precautionary measures are stipulated for all public Masses in the Diocese of Jefferson City until further notice is given:

1. Any Catholic who feels sick (fever, coughing, etc.) is not bound by the obligation to participate at Mass and must stay home for the common good. Because of the particular virulent nature of the virus for those age 60 or older, Bishop W. Shawn McKnight has granted those age 60 or older a dispensation from the obligation to participate at Mass, effective immediately. This is in addition to those already dispensed due to illness or a compromised immune system. For those unable to attend Mass, they are encouraged to participate virtually in the Mass at their local parish through social media and the internet, if possible. Spending a similar amount of time reading the Sunday Scriptures (found at www.usccb.org) and praying the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet would be laudable.
2. Priests age 60 or older, for their own safety, should practice social distancing (six feet away from others) within the celebration of Mass itself. This means they should not be greeting people before and after Mass; they should observe appropriate spacing in processions and when seated; and they should not distribute Holy Communion to the assembly. Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who are under age 60 should be utilized for the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful.
3. All holy water stoups are to be emptied. However, holy water may be made available for people to use at home.
4. Hand sanitizer should be made available at all church entrances.
5. Collections are to be taken up with minimal physical contact possible between people. Those who complete taking up the collection and depositing the collection in secure bags should immediately wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before returning to the assembly.
6. If they are not already doing so, parishioners should be encouraged to consider contributing to the parish by electronic giving. They may also mail their weekly contributions.
7. The procession with the gifts of bread and wine is suspended. The offerings should be placed in the sanctuary on the credence table before Mass with a cloth covering them for protection from inadvertent coughing and sneezing over them.
8. All contact during the Sign of Peace should be avoided. “Peace be with you” can be said while bowing the head. At the discretion of the pastor, the Sign of Peace may also be dispensed altogether.
9. Communion from the chalice is suspended for all except priests. Concelebrating priests are encouraged to use the option of intinction.
10. For individuals who have Celiac disease and can only receive Holy Communion from the chalice, a simple means of allowing them to receive from the chalice should be planned.
11. Communion on the tongue or Communion in the hand both stand as legitimate options for receiving Holy Communion. All Communion ministers should use hand sanitizer before fulfilling their ministry and avoid contacting the recipient during the distribution of Holy Communion.
12. Now is an excellent time to re-instruct everyone on the proper manner of receiving on the tongue and in the hand. In brief, Communion on the tongue should be received with a wide-open mouth, head tilted back, without sticking out the tongue, and no closing of the mouth until after the host is deposited. For reception in the hand, the right hand should be placed under the left hand with palm extended and flat (like a throne) so that the host does not slide off the hand and the recipient does not close their hand on the Communion minister’s fingers.
13. The practice of offering a blessing to a non-communicant in the communion line should be done without touching.
14. Pastors should consider whether to move the celebration of First Communion in the parish before the Season of Easter and in accord with liturgical law, or delay until the feast of Corpus Christi or after.

**Liturgical Protocols IF Community Transmission of Covid-19 Begins in Missouri**

When community transmission of COVID-19 (the Coronavirus) has been declared in our area (i.e., widespread infection), public celebrations of the liturgy will cease.

Churches will remain open for personal and household prayer, devotions, and confessions. If the parish has the practice of Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, this practice may continue, be restricted, or be suspended altogether according to the judgment of the pastor.

If COVID-19 begins to spread in Missouri because of community transmission, then the following additional measures will take immediate effect for the Diocese of Jefferson City until further notice is given:

1. The suspension of all public Masses. This includes the extension of the dispensation by the Bishop for all the faithful from the obligation to participate at Mass on Sunday.
2. The celebration of Mass by the priest should include the assistance of at least one other minister who is asymptomatic, but no more than four.
3. Priests are encouraged to solicit assistance from the laity to live-stream Masses celebrated in the parish, using social media. This can be done with a smartphone with access to the internet. If not, the Mass could be recorded (again on a smartphone) and then later uploaded to the parish website or posted for viewing online.
4. Baptisms may still be celebrated, but with the requirement to keep attendance to asymptomatic immediate family and godparents.
5. The sacrament of confession should still be offered, but penance services are to be canceled. When celebrated individually, proper social distancing should be observed as much as possible. This would seem to favor anonymous confession through the screen.
6. Holy Communion may still be administered by clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and anointing of the sick may still be administered by priests to those seriously ill or in danger of death, but always following the proper protocols for handwashing and use of masks by those infected.
7. Confirmation Masses with the bishop will be rescheduled.
8. Public weddings should be rescheduled. Simple weddings and validations may be celebrated, but only with the minister, official witnesses and asymptomatic immediate family members.
9. If they are not already doing so, parishioners should be encouraged to consider contributing to the parish by electronic giving. They may also mail their weekly contributions.
10. Public celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours, Stations of the Cross, in-person Bible study groups (or other devotional gatherings) are suspended until the public celebration of Mass resumes.
11. If this happens before Holy Week:
    1. The liturgies could be celebrated with the priest and at least one minister, and recorded as described above. If possible, an organist, keyboardist or other musician who sings, could be present to assist in order to provide some music for these most sacred celebrations.
    2. At the discretion of the pastor for those parishes with catechumens and/or candidates, the Easter Vigil could be celebrated with the catechumens and/or candidates with only asymptomatic individuals who are sponsors, RCIA team members and immediate family, or their baptism/reception may be postponed until a later time (e.g., the Vigil of Pentecost on May 30).