



# DIOCESE OF DALLAS

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## DECREE

### INTRODUCTION

On May 18, 2020, I issued a decree which continued to the second phase of the diocesan reopening plan. As indicated at that time, the opening of the Diocese is to occur in four phases. These phases are presented again here for reference.

- **PHASE ONE: Scheduled Confessions** may resume with strict social distancing guidelines; the celebration of the **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for adults and children who had been preparing for the Easter sacraments but have gone without reception into the Church due to this pandemic as well as for infants can continue in limited numbers; and religious celebrations for families (**weddings, Ordinations, Funeral Masses, Quinceañeras, etc.**) may begin in small groups.
- **PHASE TWO:** The celebration of **public daily Masses** may resume, with protocols to ensure limited and restricted attendance in keeping with distancing and safety protocols as presented by and following civil and health authorities.
- **PHASE THREE:** The celebration of **public Sunday Masses** may resume, with limited and restricted attendance increasing over time, as presented by and following civil and health authorities. Even when Sunday Mass is available, the Faithful will remain dispensed from any obligation to attend Mass on Sunday because of the continuation of restricted attendance.
- **PHASE FOUR:** The celebration of **Sunday Masses at full capacity** may resume, with a return to a state resembling Catholic life before the beginning of the pandemic.

This decree addresses the implementation of Phase Three. **Note: Phase Three will be implemented over multiple weeks; please note when particular events may begin. For example, Sunday Mass does not begin immediately in this phase, but will commence soon after the promulgation of this Decree.** Also note that these guidelines are subject to change, specifically if there are concerns over increased cases of infection in the Diocese.

Taking into consideration the health, well-being and spiritual needs of the Diocese of Dallas, as well as the advice and guidelines presented by civil authorities, I will begin the implementation of Phase Three. There is currently no scheduled date for Phase Four.

### PHASE THREE

Therefore, at this time, in consultation with the Presbyterate, following local civil and health authorities' guidelines, and out of a desire to help combat the virus and limit the flock from exposure or risk, aware that many events can by their nature attract large numbers of people, I hereby present this decree.

The following requirements apply to all limited gatherings and to the church building itself:

- **Gathering and Seating Requirements:** Groups at any event may not exceed **50% capacity** for church buildings, and all social distancing requirements (six feet of separation) must be strictly followed when individuals are present in church buildings.

When the Faithful are seated in the church building, pastors will ensure that the Faithful keep at least two empty seats (or six feet of separation) between parties in any row, except when two or more members of the same household sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or six feet of separation) empty on either side. Pastors must ensure that every other row is left empty. Which seats are available and which are closed will need to be indicated with clear signs.

It is strongly encouraged that those present in a church building wear proper face coverings, following local civil orders where appropriate.

- **The church building must be cleaned and disinfected.** Pastors must train or have trained all employees and volunteers on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. Additional protocols for this are forthcoming, but diligent cleaning must occur after every gathering or event.
- **All Diocesan Safe Environment protocols** remain strictly in place.
- Please see the [following guidelines](#) from the Governor's Office as well as guidelines from respective counties for additional information.

The following are the limited gatherings that may take place. Note that the discretion of the pastor is paramount. The pastor is the best source for determining the practicability of any liturgical celebration or event at a parish. **If a liturgical celebration or event cannot maintain the Gathering and Seating Requirements stated above, it may not take place. Moreover, all gatherings occur at the pastor's discretion. If a pastor does not believe it is possible to reach 50% capacity and maintain proper separation and cleaning requirements, he is to modify the maximum capacity accordingly.**

- **Sunday Masses** may resume on **June 28, 2020** at **50% of building capacity**. At that time, the pastor is to determine the proper schedule for Sunday Masses, taking into consideration the needs of his community and the need to allow time to sanitize the church between Masses. Sunday Masses and other devotions will continue to be livestreamed. In addition to parishes, the Diocese continues to broadcast live Masses and recorded events on the Diocese of Dallas website and local television. During such Masses, there will be an act of spiritual communion.
- **All Catholics of the Diocese of Dallas remain dispensed** from the obligation to attend Mass "on Sundays and other holy days of Obligation" (canon 1247) and **remain dispensed** until further notice, even after public Sunday Masses begin.
- **Saturday Masses, including vigil Masses,** may continue at **50% of building capacity**. Saturday vigil Masses may continue on **June 27, 2020** at **50% of building capacity**. The number of Masses celebrated on Saturdays is to be determined by the pastor.
- **Public weekday Masses (Monday through Friday)** may continue at **50% of building capacity**. The number of Masses celebrated on weekdays is to be determined by the pastor.

- Regarding the celebration of Mass:
  - If a pastor or other priest feels unable to personally celebrate Mass, priests from other parishes (ideally in his Deanery) can be asked by the Pastor to celebrate Masses where necessary.
  - So as to ensure proper capacity, it is strongly encouraged that pastors implement an online sign-up sheet for Masses, the supplying of tickets or a call-in system to account for individuals that intend to attend Mass. It is also advisable, in order to avoid turning away individuals at the door, for pastors to close parking lots, where feasible, when maximum capacity is reached. Pastors know their parishes best, and they are empowered to use appropriate means in ensuring that the maximum capacity and social distancing guidelines are met.
  - Members of vulnerable populations are strongly encouraged to not attend Mass at this time. Those who are presenting symptoms consistent with COVID-19 *should not* attend Mass.
  - Those attending Mass are strongly encouraged to wear proper face coverings, following local civil orders where appropriate
  - Those attending Mass are strongly encouraged to bring their own hand sanitizer and sanitize their hands before Mass and before receiving Holy Communion
  - Doors are to be left propped open before Mass and opened again at the end of Mass so as to avoid unnecessary touching of door handles
  - All hymnals, worship aids and other papers, such as contribution envelopes or visitor cards, must be removed from pews
  - Worship aids may only be single-use for each Mass and must be disposed of after Mass before leaving the church
  - Holding hands during the Lord's Prayer is not permitted
  - The Sign of Peace remains suspended at this time
  - Pastors should rely on their music ministry to make safe decisions regarding singing and production of music for the liturgy
  - Cry rooms and nurseries will remain closed
  - Holy Water fonts are to remain empty
  - The collection basket will not be distributed, and gifts will not be brought up in procession, but collection baskets will remain available at entrances and exits. Individuals are encouraged to donate online if possible.
  - Hospitality Ministers should wear proper face coverings during Mass
  - Hospitality Ministers will dismiss those in attendance by pew in order to ensure a staggered exit that maintains social distancing

- **For any liturgical celebration that includes reception of Holy Communion**, the following requirements must be met:
  - The Faithful (especially members of vulnerable populations) who are present at these liturgical celebrations are free to forego reception of Holy Communion and make an act of spiritual communion
  - All vessels must be sanitized before celebration
  - Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are permitted to distribute Holy Communion at this time. Pastors should be aware of the needs and concerns of all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
  - Distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended at this time
  - Priests should sanitize their hands before approaching the altar prior to the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Deacons and installed acolytes should sanitize their hands before distribution.
  - Those distributing Holy Communion should strongly consider wearing face coverings during distribution of Holy Communion
  - Those receiving Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to sanitize their hands before reception of Holy Communion
  - Those receiving Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to receive communion on the hand
  - Individuals should remove face coverings and gloves before approaching to receive communion
  - The communion line should maintain a distance of two pews between individuals to ensure safe distancing
- **The celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation as well as First Communion celebrations** continue **at the discretion of the pastor**. This includes all celebrations that have been delayed as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

**The Anointing with Chrism** during Confirmation may be done directly by hand or by the use of an instrument or cotton ball. Please see the attached document for more information. Those approaching to be confirmed should maintain a distance of two pews between individuals to ensure safe distancing. Candidates and priests administering the sacrament should consider wearing face coverings.

These celebrations may include the presence of families and guests, so long as the above Gathering and Seating Requirements are maintained.

- **Eucharistic Adoration** of the Blessed Sacrament is permitted **at the discretion of the pastor**. **The church building** may remain physically open at times during the daytime hours for prayer **at the discretion of the pastor**. The aforementioned Gathering and Seating Requirements must always be maintained.
- **Ordinations** will take place in the Diocese with the presence of families and guests, maintaining the above Gathering and Seating Requirements. This includes ordinations to the diaconate (transitional and permanent) and the priesthood.
- **Weddings**, including Convalidations, may continue with families and guests **at the discretion of the pastor**. The above Gathering and Seating Requirements must be maintained; the total number present may not exceed 50% of the total listed capacity for the church building.


- **Quinceañeras** may also continue with the presence of families and guests **at the discretion of the pastor** under the Gathering and Seating Requirements; the total number present may not exceed 50% of the total listed capacity for the church building.
- **Funeral services, including Funeral Masses, Wakes and Viewings** may continue with families and guests. The Gathering and Seating Requirements above must be maintained.
- **Scheduled Confessions** may continue with a schedule determined by the pastor. The pastor must diligently ensure that social distancing is maintained and that large groups do not gather while waiting in line for Confession. Confessions are encouraged to take place in open spaces, even outside the church building, while always providing the option for privacy and anonymity.
- **Perfect Contrition:** Even if Confession may be available in a location in the Diocese, not all of the Faithful will feel safe in approaching the sacrament at this time. Therefore, the Diocese has published a resource on Perfect Contrition that should be helpful to the Faithful who are unable to seek the Sacrament of Confession. It is located [here](#). Perfect Contrition “obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to Sacramental Confession as soon as possible.”
- **Parish gatherings among the Faithful** may continue at 50% capacity, with all Gathering and Seating Requirements maintained. Pastors are to use their discretion in determining what events are appropriate in light of the circumstances.
- **Communion as Viaticum, Anointing of the Sick and Confession** are to be given in danger of death where possible. In the event where COVID-19 is indicated, please contact the emergency number (469-401-7717).
- The **Pastoral Center** is continuing its opening process. Sacramental services (including the work of the Tribunal) remain functioning.
- **Parish Offices** may continue to be opened at the discretion of the pastor, who is to make sure that all safety and social distancing guidelines are met for employees and volunteers as described in the diocesan re-entry protocols, which have been provided to pastors and business managers
- **Diocesan schools** will remain closed, and e-learning is to continue until further notice

**This decree remains in effect until it is modified or revoked.**

Given on June 17, 2020 in the Diocese of Dallas.



Gregory Caridi  
Chancellor



Most Reverend Edward J. Burns  
Bishop of Dallas