



Office of the Vicar General

Diocese of Erie

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To: All clergy
From: Msgr. Edward M. Lohse
Re.: Modifications to the protocols for the celebration of public Masses
Date: September 16, 2020

By order of the Most Reverend Bishop

On September 10, 2020 the members of the Presbyteral Council, together with Bishop Persico, revisited the protocols established by decree of the Bishop on May 21, 2020 for the resumption of public Masses in light of the current pandemic.

As a result of that discussion, the Bishop has ordered the following revisions to the protocols for the celebration of the liturgy. The numbers refer to the norms as found in the original decree.

Under Preliminary Remarks:

1. Current norm: For all gatherings inside churches, the maximum number of participants should be limited to 1/3 of the building capacity, utilizing only every third pew.

Modification effective September 21: The limit of 1/3 capacity generally remains in place, but in parishes where using every third pew is creating more problems than it is solving*, pastors may on their own prudent judgment begin to use every other pew, provided that this enhances rather than detracts from efforts to enable social distancing.

* In some parishes, the increasing number of the faithful present for Mass is exceeding the available space, resulting in every third pew being filled by parishioners sitting should-to-shoulder or in growing numbers of people standing in the back. In such situations, the restriction to every third pew is effectively defeating social distancing efforts.

6. Current norm: Priests and deacons only (no lay ministers) may visit the home-bound for non-emergency sacramental visits but must wear masks when doing so.

Modification effective September 21: Pastors may now begin to permit extraordinary ministers of Communion to take the Eucharist to the home-bound, provided that:

- 1) the extraordinary minister freely agrees to do so
- 2) the home-bound individual and/or that person's caretaker gives consent
- 3) the minister wears a mask.

Neither clergy nor lay ministers should linger to visit at length with the home-bound individual (since that would increase the risk of transmission), but should simply celebrate the Rite and then be on their way.

Under *General Norms for All Masses*:

3. Current norm: Masses and other liturgies are to be kept very simple. There is to be no more than one lector, one server, one musician, and one cantor. When there is music, it may be necessary to limit the music to sung Mass parts.

Modification effective September 21: Pastors may now resume the regular scheduled use of servers, lectors, and musicians, and if not already done, they may begin a gradual reintroduction of music into the sacred liturgy. The use of choirs, however, continues to be prohibited. The singing of Mass parts should take precedence over the singing of hymns.

NOTE: IN THE NEAR FUTURE ...

At the November 11, 2020 meeting, members of the Presbyteral Council will begin to discuss with the Bishop how and when to consider reintroducing the Sunday Mass obligation, as well as how COVID-19 realities may affect the celebration of Advent and Christmas. They will also consider the advisability of any diocesan-wide revisions to the protocols, including evaluating the use of every third pew as a general norm.

In the meantime, deans are asked to meet with the priests and deacons of their deanery to discuss how things are going in light of COVID-19, whether further loosening of the protocols or even a tightening of the protocols is in order, and how parishes are faring financially, pastorally, spiritually, and emotionally in light of the current pandemic. Priests and deacons should anticipate an invitation to a deanery meeting sometime between now and early November.