



## Diocese of Rockville Centre

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## Office of The Vicar General

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**To: All Priests**  
**From: Office of the Vicar General**  
**Re: Covid Protocols – Updates**  
**Date: September 3, 2020**

Brothers:

Thank you for your leadership and example throughout our various crises. Thank you also for the support and encouragement that many of you have expressed for all that “the Diocese” is trying to manage in cooperation with our parishes, schools and ministry partners.

We know that adapting to COVID protocols has been most challenging and we are grateful for your understanding. Competing interests (theological, medical, practical, and even political) add to the complexities. Please understand that balancing these interests is about reasonable safety and preserving the Church’s ability to minister as effectively and unhindered as possible. That is not hyperbole. The United States Supreme Court’s July 24<sup>th</sup> decision as you know, has determined that states have the authority to limit churches while leaving secular entities (in this case, casinos) open (*Calvary Chapel Dayton Valley vs. Sisolak*).

You also know that some of the population is deeply concerned, divided, and confused, often motivated by fear and uncertainty. Some are demanding that we slow down or even shut down again. Others demand that we openly defy all regulations and recommendations. We can never allow ourselves to be moved by hysteria or threats. Nevertheless, please understand that any inconsistent application of our own diocesan-wide norms can be used against all of us. If a resurgence of the virus occurs in our region, the state could easily point to our inability to maintain our own safety standards as evidence that we cannot be trusted to remain open. It also confuses people between parishes: “*Parish X is being safe. Parish Y is not.*”, etc.

All of that having been stated, the numbers / statistics regarding COVID cases has remained very stable in our region since approximately mid-June. Please review the following. The Diocesan protocols published on June 9, 2020, remain in effect **with the exception of the following recommendations and updates:**

1. It is recommended that Churches continue to function with alternating pews closed (every other pew remaining open). If attendance exceeds capacity, please consider the possibility of overflow Masses where possible. Your extra efforts and sacrifices are appreciated.
2. The reasonable cleaning measures explained in the June 9 directives should be maintained.
3. Protocols regarding masks and social distancing outlined in the June 9 directives remain in effect.

4. **Holy Communion Distribution:** Some people continue to express their reluctance to receive Holy Communion at this time. The primary rationale for the current procedures for Communion distribution is to create two separate departure groups. Those not wishing to receive could easily depart while the priest removes his vestments, puts on his mask and sanitizes his hands. Those who receive Communion are the second departure group. This lessens the number of people exiting the Church at the same time and promotes easier social distancing inside and outside of the Church.

Several pastors have noted that this system (though unusual) has worked, and I have experienced it working well in five separate parishes. However, some pastors have expressed that they find it difficult to explain the reasoning to their people, or that the number of people reluctant to receive is negligible.

Since there is no current evidence that Mass attendance has caused a spreading of the virus in our Diocese, as of the weekend of September 12 – 13, the following procedures may be adopted:

- A. Holy Communion may be distributed at the normal time during the celebration of Mass.
  - B. Priests and those distributing Holy Communion should put on their masks, and sanitize their hands immediately before distributing Communion. **Please remind people that they must practice the utmost reverence for the Blessed Sacrament:**
    - i. They are not to “walk away” with the Sacred Host.
    - ii. If they receive Holy Communion, they must consume the Host immediately.
    - iii. If the minister is masked, those receiving Holy Communion can lower their mask immediately before receiving the Sacred Host.
    - iv. The Precious Blood is still not to be distributed to the lay Faithful at this time.
    - v. The Sign of Peace is still to be omitted.
    - vi. No one is to wear gloves while either distributing or receiving Holy Communion. The Center for Disease Control advises that glove should only be worn when one is cleaning or is caring for the sick.
  - C. The priest must remove his mask before offering the closing prayer and final blessing.
5. Pastors are reminded that the use of Choirs continues to be strongly discouraged. Hymnals and “worship aids” should be removed. Cantors may be used, and people may respond to parts of the Mass. But, vigorous communal singing should not occur. Likewise, the number of assistants in the sanctuary during Mass should be at an absolute minimum and socially distanced.
6. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass remains in effect. Those who are not feeling well or who are at risk should be reminded to remain at home.

Thank you for your careful observance of these measures.

***Oremus pro invicem!***

**Fr. Eric R. Fasano**  
**Vicar General**