



MEMORANDUM

To: All Priests; All Parishes; All Schools

From: Father Timothy Christy, V.G.

Date: May 26, 2021

Re: **New Directives Regarding the Lifting of COVID-19 Restrictions**

Monday, Governor Murphy announced in his Executive Order 242 that he is lifting most of the restrictions imposed to control the spread of COVID-19. The following guidelines are issued for the Diocese of Metuchen:

LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS – Beginning on Friday, May 28th, the faithful participating in Mass, pursuant to CDC guidelines are no longer required to wear masks. No one should be challenged concerning this policy as the CDC regulations are widely published – please make sure your ushers are aware of this policy. At the discretion of pastors, all pews may be opened for seating. In addition, all social distancing requirements are lifted for celebrations that take place in the parish church(es). **Beginning on Friday, June 4th**, parishes may return to full capacity for seating. It is recommended that a section of pews be designated for those who would prefer to keep a greater distance.

All ministries may return to full service - altar servers, lectors, ushers, greeters and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Altar servers under the age of 12 should wear masks pursuant to the CDC guidelines. Ushers may take up the offertory collection at the proper time and the procession to present the gifts of bread and wine can be resumed. The invitation to share the Sign of Peace will continue – but it should be encouraged that it is not necessary for the faithful to shake hands as there are other ways to offer the Sign of Peace or those present may choose to do so only with their immediate relatives. The distribution of Holy Communion is to be returned to its proper place within the Communion Rite, but the Precious Blood is not to be distributed to the

faithful at this time. Parishes must continue to be vigilant about cleaning commonly touched surfaces.

It is recommend that holy water fonts, into which individuals dip their hands, remain unfilled and dry at this time. The protocols for the use of water at baptism should be maintained – while water may be blessed in one vessel – the water poured for baptism should not be shared – so one vessel of blessed water for each child being baptized.

In an abundance of caution – priests, deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion should not only wash their hands before and after Mass, but should use hand sanitizer immediately before the distribution of Holy Communion (after they have consumed the Host themselves) There is no need to maintain the hand sanitizing tables adjacent to Communion stations.

Live-streaming of the Mass may continue at the discretion of the Pastor. Please keep mind while the dispensation will be lifted, the faithful are encouraged not to attend mass if they are compromised or sick. Additionally, for the same reason, the live streaming of daily mass may continue.

PARISH MEETINGS – Beginning on Friday, May 28th, masks are no longer necessary to wear (pursuant to CDC guidelines) for indoor meetings nor are they required to maintain social distancing. Beginning on Friday, June 4th, all indoor limits for meetings are lifted.

OUTDOOR EVENTS – All limits on outdoor gatherings were lifted on May 19th and beginning on Friday, May 28th, all social distancing requirements are likewise lifted. Masks are not required (pursuant to CDC guidelines). No one should be challenged in regard to this policy.

SCHOOLS – Changes to requirements for mask wearing and social distancing that will occur on Friday, May 28th and Friday, June 4th do not apply to normal school activities undertaken during the school day. All students, faculty, staff, and visitors to a school campus are required to wear a mask and maintain a 6-foot social distance where possible. Elementary and high school baccalaureate and graduation celebrations that occur inside a church should adhere to the directives for Mass. Those that occur outdoors should adhere to the recommendations for outdoor events.

FOOD SERVICES – Restrictions on food service and beverage stations have been lifted. The recommendation remains, where possible, self-service should be avoided. This can be accomplished by actually serving plated meals to people seated at tables or to call small numbers of people to a buffet where individuals behind the buffet are serving. The practical concern is that multiple people should not be touching the same serving utensils or the release mechanism and handle on coffee pots/urns.

There is flexibility depending on the nature of the group. The smaller the group (a staff luncheon, senior group, Knights of Columbus) and the more closely related they are, the safer it is to have self-service stations. The larger the group (BINGO, a graduation luncheon, parish meatball dinner), the safer it is to provide service.

Hand sanitizer should be readily available and those serving at a buffet or beverage station should wear both masks and gloves.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

NOTICE OF OBLIGATION

**Beginning with the Vigil celebration of the
Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ,
Saturday, June 5th,**

**the faithful are once again obliged to participate in Mass
on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.**

**Anyone who has a concern about returning to Mass
should discuss the matter with his or her pastor or confessor.**