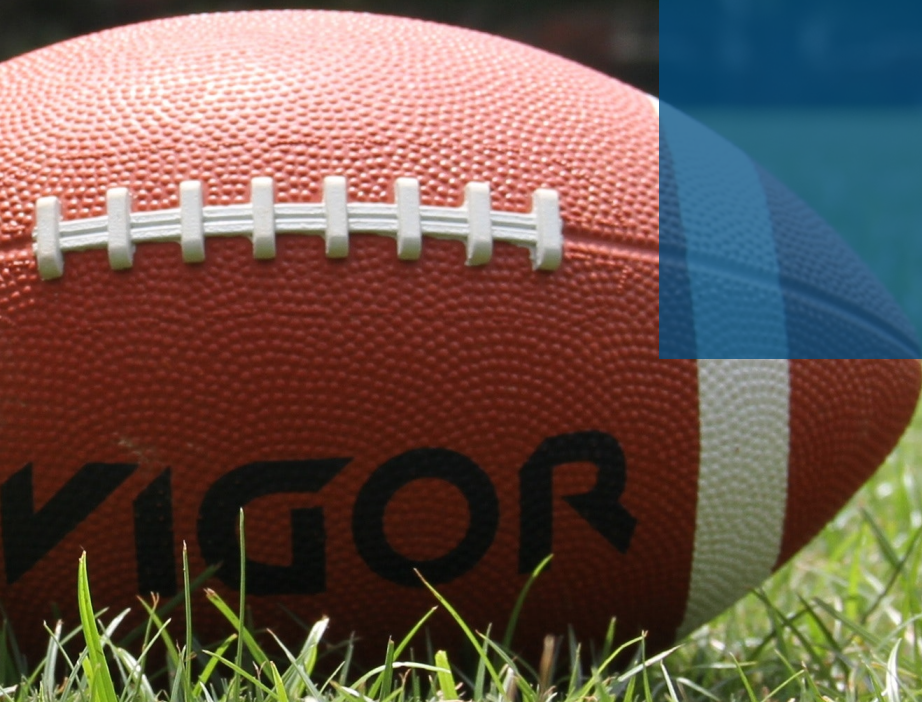


Forward in Faith

PARISH PLAYBOOK



This “Parish Playbook” is meant to accompany the recently published guidelines *“Forward in Faith: Guidance for Returning to Parish Life”* from the Diocese of Buffalo.

It is offered as a resource tool for pastors, parish administrators, and other parish leaders to efficiently plan for reopening in their particular parishes. It also hopes to clarify current diocesan guidelines. At the end of the document are some answers to common questions asked by pastors.

Please contact Fr. Seán Paul Fleming in the Office of Worship at SPFleming@buffalodiocese.org for questions or assistance in implementing these guidelines in your parish.

At all times the Diocese of Buffalo will adhere to the regulations established by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and New York State.

How do we begin planning?

- ☐ Consider creating a Parish “Reopen” Strategy Leadership Group - include on the team some health professionals who can help with plans for preventive safety measures, screening, distancing, protecting the most vulnerable, handling known cases/exposure, contact tracing, etc.

- *What is working? What needs more attention?*
- *What will change when guidelines/circumstances change?*
- *What do we need to do to be ready?*

- ☐ Develop parish specific planning strategies and policies in accordance with Guidance from CDC and New York State.
- ☐ Create an effective communication plan for needed information Be sure to share this publication with the whole parish:

How do we begin inviting people?

- ☐ Parish website/social media updated with recent information, plans for reopening, instructions, and date (when the time comes).
- ☐ Email or text to parishioners that are signed up.
- ☐ Parish video to send out/post online ahead of time.
- ☐ Ministry Leaders can help communicate to their ministry teams.
- ☐ Generate a list of what needs to be communicated to parishioners ahead of time.
- ☒ Dispensation for all parishioners who are uncomfortable attending continues.
- ☐ Live Streaming will continue for those not attending in person.

What do our people need to do to participate in person?

- ☐ Be healthy to come to the parish.
- ☐ Wear a face mask if attending Mass or coming on campus.
- ☐ Gloves are optional and not allowed when receiving Holy Communion (*Communion will only be distributed in the hand*).
- ☐ Pay attention to signs and markings in the church.
- ☐ Maintain safe physical distance from non-household members.
- ☐ Parishes might have signs made up for reopening (“Welcome back” “Remember your Mask” “Enter Here” etc.) some would be outside at entrances, some in the narthex for directing people.

How do we prepare our ministers?

- ☐ Ushers and other ministers of hospitality will need to be informed of new protocols and procedures, especially in terms of how to welcome, seat, and dismiss people.

☐ More people may be required to assist, especially with seating.

- ☐ Eucharistic Ministers need to be trained for new procedures relating to the Communion Rite.

- ☐ Sanitize hands before AND after distributing communion.
- ☐ Must wear at least a mask while distributing communion.
- ☐ Be aware of new locations and traffic patterns for distribution.
- ☐ Will now release the host in the parishioner’s hands so there is no contact.

- ☐ Cleaning team to work with maintenance to clean/sanitize after each Mass.

- ☐ Consider marking pews that were used during Mass, especially during smaller liturgies.

- ☐ Clergy & Sacristans

- ☐ Wear masks at all times in the sacristy and while distributing communion (*not mandated while at the altar*).
- ☐ Wear gloves when preparing hosts for Mass; do not place in public/high traffic area, but on credence table near sanctuary.
- ☐ Wash hands/use hand sanitizer before and after distribution of Holy Communion.

How do we prepare our parish campus?

- ☐ Determine seating spacing and delineations:

- ☐ Will ushers seat everyone?
- ☐ Will certain areas of the church be closed unless there is need for more space?
- ☐ Parishioners will be instructed to be seated in front rows first and will depart from the back pews first.

- ☐ Determine traffic flow for reception of Communion.

- ☐ Mark pews/chairs and the floor with painter's tape for distancing for reception of Communion.

- ☐ Have an overflow plan, in case the church reaches allowable capacity quicker than you think.

- ☐ What happens at Christmas? Easter? Be as welcoming and accommodating as possible
- ☐ Parish Center/School Gym — Video feed, send ministers with Communion
- ☐ Try to keep as unified a celebration as possible

- ☐ Make arrangements for offertory (long handled baskets or stationary baskets); keep diocesan guidelines in mind.

- ☐ Clean bathrooms, pews, the sanctuary.

- ☐ Before reopening do a “deep clean”.
- ☐ After each Mass.
- ☐ Add waste receptacles at the doors to make it easy for parishioners to clean up after themselves.

- ☐ Check supplies.

- ☐ Order supplies of gloves/masks/hand sanitizer.
- ☐ Encourage parishioners to use their own supply, but have these on hand in case they forget.

- ☐ Provide hand sanitizer via (automatic) dispensers at entrances to the church.

- ☐ Store your missalettes.

- ☐ Determine with your publisher what you may/may not need to order next year, including print/non-print.

- ☐ Consider “safe” way to distribute or make Bulletins available:

- ☐ Online?

- ☐ Handed out by ushers at the end of Mass?

- ☐ Write up NY Forward Reopening Plan for opening parish offices.

Think about the other sacraments/services:

- ☐ **Reconciliation**

- ☐ Crying rooms should be closed, since they encourage the mixing of families in a small area.
 - ☐ Could you use this space as a Reconciliation Room instead?
- ☐ Maintain physical distancing.
- ☐ Clean any area a penitent may have touched.
- ☐ How will you provide an option for face to face vs. anonymous?
 - ☐ A screen? drape? chair turned in the opposite direction?
- ☐ Encourage sitting/standing versus kneeling to minimize the surfaces touched with hands or breath.
- ☐ Need to clean areas in between each penitent.
- ☐ No amplification devices (apart from hearing aids) may be used.

☐ **Baptism**

Bishop Scharfenberger has said we should not celebrate baptisms for the short term.

When we do celebrate them:

- They will have to be limited to one child at a time, so that the holy water may be discarded after each baptism.
- The priest/deacon and the faithful will be required to wear masks the entire time.
- Numbers/Distancing Norms will be followed.
- Cotton swabs may be used for the Oil of Catechumens and Sacred Chrism and must be disposed of properly.

☐ **RCIA/Confirmation/First Communion** will be addressed at a later stage of reopening.

☐ **Funerals** will continue to follow guidelines for Masses.

Remember!

- **No** Altar Servers at Masses for the time being.
- **No** Choirs. Can have organist/pianist and cantor.
- **No** Holy water in fonts.
- **No one** should hesitate to stop and sanitize their hands if they feel that it is necessary at any point, especially while distributing communion—leave, sanitize, and return.
- **No** Fellowship gatherings at this time.

Responses to Some Common Questions from Pastors/Parish Administrators

Are masks and face shields for priests/Eucharistic ministers mandated?

- ☑ Masks are a minimum.
- ☑ Plexiglass, face shields, and other additions are at the discretion of the pastor/parish.

Some tabernacles have hosts that are over two months old, how do we dispose of them?

- ☑ To dispose of hosts, the priest, deacon or Eucharistic minister must dissolve it in water to the point where the host no longer has the appearance of bread. This may require that the host be broken up in small pieces prior to placing it in water. It is necessary to wait for the host to be fully soaked in water, out of respect for what once contained the presence of Christ and in order to avoid any danger or appearance of a host being discarded or profaned. However, once the host is saturated (within an hour) it must then be disposed of immediately in the sacrarium or in the earth.
- ☑ The liquid should be poured down the sacrarium (a special sink with a drain going directly into the ground, not the sewer). It should not be poured down a common sink. If such is not available, the liquid should be poured on the ground in a location that would not be walked over, such as behind a flower bed that is along a wall, at the foot of a statue or similar places.

*How do we distribute Communion to those unable to come forward?
(i.e. those with a disability)*

- ☑ At the very beginning or very end of the Communion Rite.
- ☑ Have ushers indicate where they are seated and ministers should go to them.

Is there any talk of churches opening up based on percentage of capacity versus such a small number like 10 people, which is perhaps not practical?

- ☑ Yes the State has been contacted to consider this request, as it may allow us to all open sooner and together (i.e. large and small churches).

Is there a date when we can start Public Masses?

- ☑ No date has been established for the resumption of regularly scheduled Masses.
- ☑ It may be prudent to begin with a phased approach—individual prayer, daily Mass, and then Sunday/Holy Day Masses.
- ☑ This will be communicated by the diocese.

Are Communion Services a good alternative to Masses?

☑ It is not recommended to separate the reception of the Eucharist from the sacrifice of the Mass and we cannot recommend multiplying Communion Services, nor should we multiply Masses. Hence, the low 10-person gathering is a difficulty.

What about Drive-In and Parking Lot Masses?

- ☑ This requires much forethought and planning.
- ☑ People would not be able to exit their cars.

Will the temperature in their cars be safe? (Consider the time of day.) Are the cars running? Will there be negative results from idling? (pollution, ticketing for idling too long)

Will car batteries hold out? Does the parish provide emergency assistance? Is this a liability? Will there be people to direct traffic?

- ☑ Local law enforcement, neighboring parishes, and vicars forane should be involved.
- ☑ Government guidelines should be followed.
- ☑ Consider doing a Liturgy of the Word or a Mass with Spiritual Communion.
- ☑ Distribution of the Eucharist could be more challenging and impractical in this unfamiliar format and the safety is dubious.

Could a regional gathering or Mass at a drive-in facility be organized?

- ☑ Yes with proper planning, following all guidelines.

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