



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF WORSHIP

COVID-19 Update: Interim Guidance for Parishes June 15, 2021

It is wonderful news that 70% of New York adults have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. While this does not signal the end of the pandemic or the vigilance, care, and pastoral concern that we must continue to show for one another as Church, it does indicate that we are making significant progress as a community in mitigating this public health crisis and its effects.

Parishes should continue to encourage individuals to follow all local, state, and federal guidance as it is updated/issued.

Vaccinations

Participation at in-person Masses and other parish events *should not* be contingent on vaccination status, nor should individuals be questioned regarding their vaccination status or asked to produce a vaccine card.

Capacity

At the discretion of parish leadership, reservations, pew restrictions, and other measures to limit capacity may be relaxed. However, individuals from different households should still be encouraged to maintain reasonable separation.

Masks

Based on prevailing guidance from health officials or an individual's doctor or other medical professional, masks are now optional, but may continue to be worn at the discretion of the individual. Out of pastoral concern, the safety of others should always be considered when making this choice.

Ministers of the Eucharist are encouraged to continue to wear masks when distributing Communion for the protection of the vulnerable and those who may not be able to be vaccinated.

Dispensation & Livestream

As of June 6, 2021, the dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass has been lifted and all practicing Catholics should be invited to resume regular, in-person worship.

To support this effort, it is suggested that live-streaming of regularly scheduled Masses be limited to one Mass per language offered per week. (Weddings, funerals, and other celebrations may still be offered to include family members who may not yet be ready to travel.)

Holy Water Fonts & Shared Materials

Based on current guidance from New York State (June 9, 2021), baptismal fonts and holy water stoups should remain empty; hymnals and shared, reusable texts should still be absent from pews.

Hygiene, Cleaning, and Disinfection

After each liturgy, worship spaces should continue to be disinfected, especially high-risk areas or frequently touched surfaces.

Singing

New York State's recent guidance says, in part, "...Any singing activity must provide for a distance between individuals of at least twelve feet, subject to additional protective measures..."

This guidance remains unchanged, and thus we cannot relax any prior guidelines regarding full choirs. Congregational singing should still be discouraged, but those who choose to sing should wear a mask to increase safety and reduce the potential exposure to others.

Choirs may wish to safely rehearse/recruit over the summer with the hope that by the fall, based on progress and prudent judgment at that time, they may be able to return in full.

*Thank you for your continued attention to the safety and sensitivity of our people!
These guidelines will continue to be periodically reviewed and updated.*