



Updated COVID-19 Protocols Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana April 2021

In writing these protocols, it is important to note that we are not able to address every situation that may arise. The COVID-19 pandemic is an ever-evolving situation and has various implications for parishes based on size and location. Certainly, the hope is that by later this summer/early fall, we will be able to see, in greater measure, the effects of increased vaccinations and herd immunity. However, one thing that this pandemic has taught us is that we cannot fully predict where we will be as a diocese, city, parish or state in the months to come. As we have done since the last formal revision of the protocols last fall, we will send out supplementary communications to adjust to changing state and local guidelines, restrictions and infection rates. The diocesan staff is always open to answering any questions that may arise.

When considering an event, worship service or other parish gathering, take three things into consideration: **Distancing/Masking/Responsibility**. Masking is one of the most important safety measures that we can take for one another. And, whenever possible, maintain distance. Use your best judgement. As the pandemic has progressed, it has become increasingly evident that spread is more likely to occur through droplets, not contact. It is not necessary (although acceptable) that the church is sanitized after each service, but rotating pews between multiple Sunday services is a relatively easy way to reduce contact-related risks. Continue hand hygiene protocols at the doors and before communion.

Communion

The diocese will allow for congregations to distribute communion by hand, if desired. Communion in paper cups should be available for those who wish to receive in this manner. If administered by hand, the following protocols should be observed:

- Members of the congregation will remain socially distanced as they approach to receive.
- All who receive will practice hand hygiene before receiving.
- The priest/celebrant will also practice hand hygiene.
- Do not kneel or stand along the altar rail. Approach one at a time.
- The bread will be placed (gently dropped) in the hand of the person receiving.
- If hands touch, the priest will practice hand hygiene before distributing the next individual.
- The bread will be consumed in the pew.
- All must remain masked.

Although we will not distribute in two kinds, priests should consecrate both the bread and a small amount of wine. The entire Eucharistic prayer should be read.

Parish Functions/Coffee Hour

We strongly advise that coffee hour with food and drink are not held indoors because of the difficulty in maintaining distance and masking while eating. However, outdoor gatherings are acceptable. However:

- Continue to wear masks as much as possible during all events (indoors or outdoors).
- Food and drinks should be individually packaged. No buffets.
- If pouring from a carafe, designate one individual to perform this duty. That person must be masked and maintain hand hygiene.
- This guideline pertains to receptions for school/graduation functions as well.
- Masks may be removed briefly for outdoor group pictures.

Other parish events such as bake sales, garage sales, fundraisers, etc. in which food is served should be held outside, if possible. Indoors, use the standard of **distancing, masking and responsibility** to determine if the function is safe. Large, crowded gatherings are still not recommended indoors. Be mindful of capacity if holding events indoors.

Masks should be worn, even in small group gatherings. Remain pastorally sensitive to those who find themselves venturing out for the first time in a year.

Singing/Choirs/Preaching and Reading

Choirs can resume as long as there is 6 ft distance between singers and 10 ft between the singers and the congregation. Even if vaccinated, masks should be worn. At this time, we cannot encourage congregational singing. Hopefully, this will be an area we can revisit with a movement towards increased vaccination.

To remove a mask to preach or read, 10 ft of distance must be maintained. Consider not allowing seating in the front pews to accommodate this spacing. However, remember that remaining masked is the safest option.

VBS/Summer Camps

Congregations should follow state and local guidelines for distancing, masks and hand hygiene in school and camp settings. If followed, these activities can resume. However, remain vigilant about possible infections.

Contact Tracing/Registration

Contact tracing and/or “signing in” is still recommended. Some congregations will maintain a practice of pre-registration to ensure safe capacity and distancing. This is supported by the diocese.

Distancing in Church

Maintaining 6 ft distance is still recommended. Congregations cannot separate vaccinated individuals from unvaccinated ones.

LEV/Home Communion

Home communion can resume if the priest/deacon/LEV is only visiting one person at a time. Communion boxes should be cleaned by the individual administering home communion and not left to parish staff or altar guild. When possible, meet outdoors. Maintain hand hygiene and masking.

Collection plates

Collection plates should not be passed during the service.