



**DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
47 UNDERWOOD STREET
FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS 02720**

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

**GUIDELINES FOR LITURGICAL PRACTICES
AS PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED**

EFFECTIVE MAY 29, 2021

In light of the recent updated health advisories by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the lifting of State COVID-19 restrictions, parishes in the Fall River Diocese may reinstate most liturgical practices that had to be suspended or modified because of the pandemic. These guidelines, which become effective on May 29, 2021, address those practices. In addition, they are provided to assist parishes with guidance on other adjustments and changes that need to be made in this period of transition.

These changes are a welcome sign that the long-awaited return to a normal way is at last upon us. We move forward with gratitude to God for His divine assistance in getting us to this point and in prayerful remembrance of the many who have died or who have experienced tremendous suffering because of COVID-19. Sincere thanks and appreciation must also be extended to the clergy and faithful of the Diocese for their cooperation and understanding. The need to maintain a reverent worship experience and accessibility to the sacraments while providing as safe an environment as possible required sacrifice and adjustment by all of us.

Going forward as of May 29:

- Indoor seating capacity is increased to 100%; therefore, any previously “roped off” pews can be opened for use.
- The practice of reservations, tickets, contact information gathering, or single entrance restrictions may be relaxed.
- Masking tape, plexiglass, and other signage related to COVID-19 restrictions may be removed.
- With regard to masks, those who are fully vaccinated are no longer required to wear a mask to attend Mass or any other liturgical or social function held on parish property. Pastors may wish to remind the faithful that those who are fully vaccinated are free and welcome to continue to wear masks if they choose to do so. According to the most recent CDC and Commonwealth of Massachusetts guidelines, non-vaccinated persons are advised to continue wearing face masks and to continue distancing in most indoor settings. This includes our churches. While there is no way for parishes to enforce this, pastors may also wish to remind the faithful of this current guideline and to note that each person is asked to make the best decision for him/herself while keeping in mind the need for a collective commitment to the common good of one’s parish community.

- Given that churches may again utilize full seating capacity, the celebration of outdoor Masses should be discontinued.
- Pastors, staff, volunteers, and ministers should ensure a welcoming environment, especially for those who have not been attending Mass in person and are now returning to church.
- The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays remains in effect in the Fall River Diocese at this time.

The following may be reintroduced at this time:

- Liturgical processions (Entrance, Offertory, Recessional).
- The use of Hymnals and worship aids in the pews.
- Congregational singing and choral singing, keeping in mind the need for discretion in the proximity of members of a choir. Providing some spacing between choir members is recommended at this time.
- Holy Water fonts may be filled.
- The passing of the offertory basket may resume. This should be carried out by an usher and not by the collection plate passed from person to person to limit unnecessary contact.
- The instruction to “offer a sign of peace” may be given. This “sign” should be done without physical contact, but instead by word or gesture, for those who are not from the same household. The sign of peace may also be replaced by a moment of silent prayer.
- Deacons can perform their full liturgical roles as usual.
- The participation of altar servers, readers, and, as needed, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, is encouraged. It should be clearly communicated to parents that children should wear masks while altar serving.
- Proper cleaning and normal sanitization practices should be carried out. The use of harsh chemicals on the pews or the sanitization of the church after each Mass is not necessary.

Pastors should continue to observe the following:

- Because of the proximity of penitent and priest in Confession, it is advisable for both to wear a mask.
- Sufficient hand sanitizing dispensers should be made available at the entrances of the church.
- The distribution of the Precious Blood to the Faithful should remain suspended.
- Use of hand sanitizers by all Ministers of Holy Communion before and after the distribution of Holy Communion.

- Hand sanitizer should be kept close at hand in case someone receives Holy Communion on the tongue.
- Allow for proper ventilation and increased airflow and HVAC filtration when possible.
- Avoid unnecessary crowding at the entrances and aisles of the church whenever possible.
- Parishioners who have not been vaccinated and who are not from the same household should be encouraged to maintain physical distance from others in the pews.