



Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Office of the Archbishop

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May 26, 2020

Dear Pastors, Administrators and Business Managers,

We are prepared to begin the process of reopening our parishes.

With our Auxiliary Bishops, the Council of Priests, and lay advisors we have drawn up the enclosed guidelines for reopening, based on the safest practices. These guidelines are consistent with guidance offered in recent days, and in consultation with public officials.

As you will see, the guidelines require each parish to have a safety plan in place that is approved by your Regional Bishop.

Pastors who are ready, after they have received approval from their Regional Bishop for their church reopening plan, may proceed to open their church for personal private prayer.

The earliest date for reopening our parishes for daily Mass is Wednesday, June 3, the Memorial of St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, and for Sunday Mass, June 7, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

As we enter this new moment, it is important to remember that the coronavirus is still out there, it is still contagious, and it is still dangerous. So, we need to proceed with prudence and caution and concern to protect our most vulnerable parishioners.

Let us continue to pray and stand together with our people as we begin to reopen our churches and our society. Know that I am praying for you and I ask you to please pray for me and my ministry.

May Mary, our Blessed Mother, watch over us all and keep us safe,

+ José H. Gomez

Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles



The following guidelines have been prepared in consultation with the Auxiliary Bishops, Council of Priests, lay advisors, and approved by the Archbishop. They are based on, but do not replace, guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [California Department of Public Health](#), County Departments of Health (for example, [Los Angeles County](#) including APPENDIX F “Reopening Protocol for Places of Worship,” [Santa Barbara County](#)) and local authorities (for example, [City of Los Angeles Toolkit for Houses of Worship](#)), which should also be consulted. Parishes are exhorted to work prudently to implement them so as to be of service to their people while safeguarding their health.

The reopening of the churches of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles will take place in steps. If a parish is not ready for a particular step, it should remain at its current status while working to be ready.

STEP ONE: Pastors who are ready, after they have received approval from their Regional Bishop for their church reopening plan, may proceed to open their church for personal private prayer, even though not all the sacraments are offered.

In order to be ready:

- Pastors must arrange for their churches to receive a deep cleaning. Cleaning materials should also be on hand to disinfect points of contact after each visitor departs. A disinfectant that will not harm church surfaces should be used.
- Hand sanitation must be available for all visitors. This could take several forms, ranging from touch-less dispensers of antibacterial gel at the doors or wash stations in restrooms. Signage at the doors should advise people of the need to have clean hands before entering the church.
- Parishes should minimize potential points of contact (e.g. baptismal fonts and holy water containers at church entrances should be empty; hymnals and missalettes should be removed from pews; tapers should be removed from votive candle racks; frequently touched objects such as statues, etc., should be cordoned off).
- Pastors must ensure that employees and volunteers adhere to the guidelines provided by the [CDC](#), [State of California](#), County Departments of Health (for example, [Los Angeles County](#) including APPENDIX F “Reopening Protocol for Places of Worship,” [Santa Barbara County](#)), and/or [City Offices](#) regarding healthy hygiene practices, employee and volunteer training.

- High-risk individuals (e.g., people who are 65 and older, who are immuno-compromised or who have underlying health conditions) should be discouraged from serving in any capacity that brings them into contact with others.
- Pastors should establish a written plan for resuming operations in the church building to be shared with employees and volunteers. This plan should include how he will maintain the state mandated limit of 25% of building capacity or 100 attendees, whichever is lower. The plan should also refer to [Archdiocesan protocols](#) regarding priests, employees, volunteers, or visitors who tests positive for COVID-19. The plan must be signed by the pastor, submitted by email to the regional office, and approved by the regional Auxiliary Bishop before the parish is allowed to open.

One or more volunteers (or employees) should be stationed at the door(s) of the church whenever it is open. The volunteer(s) will perform a variety of duties:

- Greet all visitors. California state guidelines recommend signage and use of social media advising people experiencing symptoms or considered at higher risk to stay home, but volunteers/employees at the doors could reinforce this message and remind visitors of the ongoing dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. Visitors should wash/sanitize their hands and wear a face covering.
- Open the door for visitors to keep the points of contact to a minimum. Ushers should utilize face mask and gloves.
- Count visitors as they enter, to ensure that the number of visitors at any given time does not exceed the maximum number of people permitted by the local authorities.
- Act as ushers, inviting each group to a particular part of the church, where they should remain (no roaming around the church), maintaining social distancing (seated in every other row, with six feet of separation except when two or more members of the same household sit adjacent to one another).
- Ensure that pews and other points of contact are wiped down when visitors leave.

Due to a variety of circumstances (e.g., size, space limitations, local coronavirus-positive cases, underlying health condition of pastor), not all parishes may be able to offer the same opportunities. Pastors may wish to coordinate with neighboring parishes in order to maximize available resources. In all cases, pastors should communicate clearly and frequently with their parishioners about their plans to reopen their churches. Charity and understanding are asked of all the faithful during this time.

The Blessed Sacrament may be exposed for silent adoration by the faithful, but no Benediction or other organized/communal prayer should take place.

Priests who are present may hear individual Confessions upon request if strict social distancing guidelines are observed:

- A location must be arranged so that confessions may be heard with safe distancing while maintaining privacy for the seal of the confession.
- Space must be provided for penitents to wait in line while maintaining safe distancing.
- Both priest and penitent should wear face coverings.
- The priest and penitent should remain at least 6 feet apart. They do not need to face one another. Ideally both will remain standing, so as to minimize points of contact.
- If priest and penitent are seated, they may sit side-by-side, facing in the same direction, so as to help maintain hygiene. Penitent's chair and other points of contact must be wiped down when penitent leaves. Priests should always be aware of maintaining privacy for the Penitent.

Given the continuing limitation on large public gatherings, and so as to allow people who are not well or otherwise at risk the ability to stay home, the following provisions will remain in effect until further notice:

- The general dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass remains in place.
- People in vulnerable populations are encouraged to stay home.
- Parishioners are reminded of the need for smaller congregations.
- Live-streaming of Mass remains available.
- No social sharing of food or drink before or after Mass or any other gathering.

We look forward to the faithful partaking more fully of the sacraments as soon as it is safe. It is reasonable to assume that this would happen gradually, as follows:

STEP TWO: As of June 3, 2020, Pastors may offer **Mass** and **Scheduled Confessions** with strict social distancing guidelines. The celebration of the **Sacraments of Initiation** (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for adults and children who had been preparing for the Easter sacraments but have gone without reception into the Church due to the pandemic, as well as for infants, can continue in limited numbers; and religious celebrations for families (**Weddings, Funerals, Quinceañeras**) may take place.

As part of the preparation to move into Step Two, the prerequisites for Step One must already be in place. Updated plans for how the parish will move into Step Two should be sent to the Regional Office before the parish continues. The following additional provisions apply for Step Two:

For any gathering:

- Choirs are to be replaced with a cantor and accompanist.
- Designate different doorways as entrances and exits.
- Dismiss people after Mass by groups of pews so as to maintain distancing.

For Confessions:

- In addition to what is provided above regarding Confessions:
- The location of the confessions does not need to be in the church. One or more classrooms or meeting rooms could serve as confessionals.

For the Sacraments of Initiation for the Elect:

- Immersion fonts will not be used to confer baptism. Blessed water will be poured into smaller containers, and each person will be baptized with water poured from a different container. The water will not be reused.
- The invitation to the Sign of Peace is omitted. No physical contact should be made during the Sign of Peace.
- Holy Communion will be offered only in the form of bread, in the hand. The priest should sanitize his hands before offering Communion, after making any physical contact with someone while giving Communion, and after Communion has concluded.
- Lines for Communion will be monitored so that communicants stand 6 feet apart and 6 feet distant from other participants in pews.

For Infant Baptisms:

- In addition to what is provided above regarding baptism:
- The use of the Oil of Catechumens and the “Ephphatha” rite are to be omitted.

For Mass:

- In addition to what is provided above regarding Holy Communion, the distribution of Communion may take place at its usual time or immediately after the conclusion of Mass, using the form given in the *Rite for Holy Communion Outside of Mass*.

Even when Sunday Mass becomes available, the Faithful will remain dispensed from any obligation to attend Mass on Sunday because of the continuation of restricted attendance.

Pastors may also wish to implement some (or all) of the following options, as appropriate:

- Schedule a separate Mass for vulnerable parishioners.
- Count parishioners who enter and close the doors as necessary once capacity is reached.
- Determine an appropriate system (specific to each location) to manage Mass attendance.
- Offer single-use handouts (worship aids) or projection system instead of hymnals.
- Provide baskets near the doors to receive donations safely, supplementing online giving.

Checklist to Accompany Parish Plan for Reopening

In order to reopen the parish church, the Pastor or Administrator must submit their plan along with this form to the Regional Office.

Pastor should initial at each , sign this form and send to the Regional Office.

PARISHES MAY NOT REOPEN WITHOUT SUBMITTING A WRITTEN PLAN

Parish: _____ **Pastor:** _____

- _____ Parish has submitted written plan to the Regional Office and shared the plan with staff and volunteers.
- _____ Parish has posted dates/times of opening on website and social media.
- _____ Parish has directions and signage around church to assist and instruct visitors.
- _____ Parish has sufficient hand sanitizer on hand to allow for visitors to church.
- _____ Parish has scheduled staff and volunteers to serve as greeters and cleaners and has shared with them their role.
- _____ Parish has stock of gloves and masks and cleaning materials for staff and volunteers who will work at reopening as greeters and cleaners.
- _____ Parish has location for private confessions mapped out and has plan for ingress and egress of penitents.
- _____ Parish has plan for cleaning of restrooms at short intervals.

Schedule (Days of week/hours): _____

Collaborating with another parish (Name of other parish): _____

Confessions available: Yes No

Anything that you would like to add (Feel free to use the back):

Signature (Pastor): _____