



Catholic Diocese of Sale

PASTORAL AND LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES AND THE RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC LITURGIES ¹

Introduction

As we progress to an easing of COVID-19 health restrictions, we find ourselves adjusting to a new reality. We give grateful thanks now for the possibility of personal prayer in our churches and the limited resumption of Masses. We long for the day when we may once more gather with the whole of our faith community in worship.

The Diocesan Pastoral Office, authorised by Fr Peter Slater, Delegate of the Diocesan Administrator, has prepared the following guidelines for clergy and parish communities, to complement the directives already issued by the Victorian Government, The Victorian Bishops and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

These liturgical considerations are limited to the celebration of Mass and do not include directives for other sacramental rites. They are offered to assist clergy and their communities to adequately prepare for the resumption of Masses, taking into account current health directives.

The First Weeks

YOUR PARISH PLAN FOR RESUMPTION OF LITURGIES

- Prepare your parish for the re-opening of the church(es) for private prayer and for public liturgies.
- Meet with your parish staff, pastoral council or key volunteers. Meetings can be held virtually using WhatsApp, Zoom and other online platforms. These are very easy to install and use.
- Plan how you will communicate your parish community (see suggestions below) and what instructions they will need to follow.
- Work through the pastoral and liturgical considerations and carefully read the directives given out by the Victorian Government, the Victorian Bishops and particular directions for our Diocese from Fr Peter Slater, delegate of the Diocesan Administrator.
- Think about the logistics and requirements for
 1. Opening up churches for prescribed times for personal prayer
 2. Opening up churches for Sunday Mass

¹ This resource has used and adapted material from *A Synopsis of Pastoral Considerations for the Reopening of Churches and the Resumption of Public Masses*, <https://www.fdlc.org/sites/default/files/files/Re-Opening%20Summary%20FDLC.pdf>

- Volunteers are needed for
 1. Welcoming back attendees
 2. Recording the names and contact details of each person and submitting the record to the parish office.
 3. Ensuring that the maximum number of attendees permitted is not exceeded (this does not include those required for the service e.g. presider, deacon, altar server, reader, musician)
 4. Ensuring hand sanitising and safe distancing
 5. Ushering people to designated seats
 6. Cleaning the church thoroughly following use, following the recommended cleaning and sanitisation steps as outlined by Government directives (perhaps the parish might contract this onerous task to a professional cleaner). Note that this cleaning and sanitisation is NOT a quick job but needs to be undertaken with care and thoroughness.
 7. Ensuring appropriate departure procedures from the church.
- Undertake an induction process for all of your parish volunteers so that they know exactly what to do. Hand out printed instructions for each task.

COMMUNICATION

- Provide adequate signage on your church doors to let people know what is expected.
- Communicate ahead of time with the entire parish. Give people a preview of what social distancing or other precautions will be in place. Advise them of what the procedure will be before they come to the church.
- Mail a letter from the pastor, send an e-mail blast, and/or post a video on the parish website or Facebook page, or via letter drop in people's letterboxes (particularly for those who do not connect online)
- Let your community know the current allowable capacity of your church (currently 10 is the maximum). The number of people will be limited by space and must comply with government health directives.
- Communicate your plan for placing bookings for Mass: whether by phone, email or online bookings.
- Inform all attendees that Communion will only be given on the hand during this time.
- Parishioners may not be able to sit in their usual place and should be directed to seating as marked out in the church.
- Parishioners in the at-risk group should stay at home (including elderly, frail, those with chronic illness or immune-compromised)
- Anyone with any respiratory symptom, however slight, must stay at home.

Liturgy

When the liturgical day permits, consider using the new Mass texts approved by Pope Francis – *Masses for Various Needs and Occasions: In the Time of Pandemic*.

<https://tinyurl.com/Mass-texts-in-tine-of-pandemic>

PREPARATIONS

Requirements:

- Signage will be needed to indicate:
 - *Precautions for Returning to Mass* posters on church doors
 - entrance and exit (which must be kept separate)
 - the maximum number permitted at any time, allowing 4 square metres/person
 - which pews should be empty (every second pew)
 - seating in a given pew
 - central aisle should be marked with spots every 1.5 m for the communion procession
- Distancing of at least 1.5m between attendees. This could be by ensuring that every second pew is empty. Members of the same household can be nearer. Signs could indicate which pews should be empty. Seats may be marked appropriately to indicate where people may sit.
- Volunteers to register the attendees, including: name, phone number, date & time of attendance
- Provision of hand sanitiser stations at entrance to church
- All attendees to use hand sanitiser before entering the church
- Volunteer ushers to ensure safe distancing is practised and to direct people to pre-marked seating
- Provision of soap and hand sanitiser and paper towels in church toilets
- Provision of hand sanitiser on the credence table so that presiders, deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may sanitise their hands before and after communion
- Bread and wine are to be kept away from public areas and brought from the credence table. A ciborium with a lid and a chalice with a pall should be used.
- Set up a water bowl, pitcher and towel for the lavabo on the credence table.
- Minimal music ministry – perhaps limited to one musician and a cantor or single musician/cantor. Choirs and music groups should be discouraged from ministering at this stage. Keyboards, music stands and instruments should be cleaned between Masses.
- All missals and hymn books are to be removed from the pews.
- There are to be no collections taken up during Mass. Collection boxes or receptacles are placed in a convenient location in the church for the donation of planned giving envelopes and presbytery offerings following the conclusion of Mass. Many parishes have also commenced offering direct-debit arrangements for their parishioners.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

- Replace entrance procession through the assembly with simple entry from the sacristy.
- Offer thanks to God for this time where we are once more assembled around the table of the Lord.
- Welcome people back and acknowledge the trauma and stress that has been a common experience within the community.
- Remind the assembly about liturgical restrictions:
 - No handshake at Sign of Peace, but acknowledge others with a nod or bow.
 - Holy Communion will be distributed in the hand only. The Chalice will not be offered.
- Be mindful of the various options available for the Penitential Rite
- Instead of having a server hold the Missal for the praying of the Collect, consider placing a temporary stand near the Presider's chair.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

- In parishes where there are usually two lectors during the Liturgy of the Word, what arrangements will be to maintain a safe environment? Where will they sit and how will they approach the ambo?
- If your cantor usually sings the responsorial psalm from the ambo, consider, instead, placing the cantor at a safe distance near the musician accompanying the psalm.
- There is no Gospel procession.
- In the Prayers of the faithful, include petitions for those working in the front line of the pandemic, as well as those who have suffered in various ways through isolation or illness. Remember to include all those who have died during this time of pandemic, especially those in your parish.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

- There is to be no collection taken up (see note above)
- There is no procession of gifts.
- Place the bread and wine on the credence table for the presider or deacon to take to the altar. A ciborium with lid and chalice with pall should be used. When uncovered, the elements should ideally be kept out of range of the presider's breath.
- The priest administers his own *lavabo*, either after the altar server has set the bowl, pitcher and towel on the altar and stepped back, or in the absence of a deacon or altar server, from the credence table.
- Avoid hand contact during the Lord's Prayer.
- Avoid handshakes during the Sign of Peace. Acknowledge others with a bow or nod instead.

Communion Rite

- The Communion Rite is an essential and unmovable element of the Order of Mass (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*)
- While numbers of attendees at Mass are still small, there will be no need for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- After the Sign of Peace and before the Communion Rite, all those involved in distributing Holy Communion (at this stage, just the presider) sanitise their hands. If there is more than one minister, safe distancing should be practised.
- The presider may remind the assembly about keeping a safe distance during the communion procession. These spots could be temporarily marked on the aisle.
- It is within the authority of the local Bishop or his authorised Delegate to establish the conditions for the distribution of Communion.
- Until further notice, Holy Communion is to be given on the hand only.
- Until further notice, the assembly should not receive Holy Communion from the chalice.
- After Communion is completed, ministers again sanitise their hands.
- Note that the use of gloves or tongs for the distribution of Holy Communion is no more effective than distributing with the bare hand. Indeed, use of gloves or tongs would have to be changed for each communicant.

CONCLUDING RITE

- The presider may make full use of the options for blessings, taking into account the liturgical season and the needs of the faithful.
- At the close of Mass, the presider might remind the assembly about where they may place their planned giving and presbytery offerings.
- At the close of Mass, the presider might remind the assembly again about dispersing with safe distancing measures and hand sanitisation before departure.
- Do not offer any refreshments after Mass.

Cleaning Directives

- Ensure that the church is cleaned and sanitised thoroughly after each Mass: pews,ambo, door handles, vessels, toilet facilities etc. The recommended cleaning process can be accessed from the Federal or State Government COVID-19 websites.
- Ensure that all volunteers rostered to clean the church know how to do this properly. It is not a quick job!

Pastoral Care

During this time, more than ever, we need to be aware of those who in difficult situations.

Our clergy have been engaged in pastoral care, all through this time of pandemic, in various ways. The parish community can also be involved and through their extended social and communication networks, be aware of those who may need some support and offer practical care. The Parish Pastoral Council, together with the clergy and parish workers/volunteers, may wish to consider the following:

- How can we find out who, in our community, needs pastoral care during this time?
- How might we support them? – with practical actions such as phone calls, messages, a meal delivered to the door.
- What about those who may need counselling and other related support services?
- How can we support those families who have been bereaved during this time of pandemic?
- How can parishioners assist in caring for one another? What practical support is needed?
- How might we work collaboratively with our school communities in discerning and supporting those families in need, facing the challenges of unemployment and providing for their children?