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Dated

PASTORAL GUIDELINES ON THE RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC MASSES

Sine dominico non possumus meaning “Without the gift of the Lord, without the Lords day [Sunday], we cannot live,” said Emeritus, a man from a group of faithful arrested for celebrating the Eucharist against the prohibitive imperial order, when they were questioned why they celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday. The early Christians, during the Roman empire, dared to celebrate the Eucharist in spite of the threat of death penalty. Many celebrated the Eucharist in the Catacombs, that is, the burial places.

“We too cannot live without partaking of the sacrament of our salvation; we too desire... to reflect in our lives what we celebrate on the Lord's Day” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 95). How can we carry the burden of our daily life and its multiple preoccupations, without the gift of the Lord, who gives himself to us in the Eucharist? For us, the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life and mission.

Today, it is not the imperial edict that prohibits us from gathering for worship but the fear of the possibility of contagion of the deadly corona virus. Now, we are permitted to open the churches with Covid-19 safety measures and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) given for our own protection by the government authorities. We are made responsible to protect ourselves and others when we come together to worship the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Christian charity demands us to be attentive so that we do not become the cause of the spread of contagion. At the same time, we cannot deprive ourselves of the spiritual food for an indefinite period. Many have constantly asked us: When will the churches be opened so that we receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord as our spiritual food?

Following the guidelines issued by the Central and State governments, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, and the President of the Karnataka Regional Catholic Bishops' Council, we have formulated a few directives for our own safety and that of our brothers and sisters. In our diocese, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and weekdays can be resumed from **13 June 2020**. However, the Parish Priests should ensure that the parish is adequately prepared to take care of all protective measures before opening the churches to the public for common worship. This matter has to be discussed in the Parish Pastoral Council and fulfill all the requirements so as to protect the faithful coming to worship the Lord. Nevertheless, those Parish Priests and Parishes requiring more time to prepare themselves to comply with the operational norms and safety protocols, should do the needful with all earnest and begin celebrating the Holy Eucharist in their churches from **20 June 2020**.

Dispensation from the obligation of participating in Sunday Mass is granted to the following until further determination:

- Children below the age of 10 and adults above 65 years of age (also advised not to participate in services held in the church/places of worship).



- b) People living in the containment area declared by the government (they are not to participate in the service at the church).
- c) People with comorbidities, pregnant women, as well as those who are in 'quarantine' at home (these should not come to the church).
- d) Persons already infected with Covid-19 and those exhibiting the symptoms (these should never attend the services or come in contact with others for the greater good of the community/society).

All those who are dispensed from the obligation and those who are unable to participate in the Sunday Eucharist for serious reasons during this pandemic season, are to participate online in sacramental services from the safety of their homes. However, those who are asymptomatic and are healthy should take initiative to visit and pray before the Blessed Sacrament during weekdays, participate in the weekday Mass, read Holy Bible and do spiritual reading, and so on.

Four Guiding Principles Supporting Reopening the Churches:

1. Divine Worship and Sacraments are essential to our faith life/dimension; the unwarranted fear and anxiety cannot immobilize us amidst difficult situation. "God has not given us a spirit of fear; instead he has given us a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). We shall overcome the pandemic with faith in God and love for all.
2. Everything possible should be done to provide people the solace of the Church's sacramental life and pastoral accompaniment in a timely and reasonable way.
3. Trust needs to be established that the top priority in our gathering for worship is the safety and wellbeing of people. We cannot take for granted that people will return just because churches are reopened.
4. Calling people to exercise faithful and responsible citizenship will be the key. Each Catholic will need to take personal responsibility for the common good as well as one's own safety.

I. General Guidelines: Reopening the Doors

1. Form a Covid-19 Safety Committee at the Parish Level to implement and monitor the safety measures and the Standard Operating Procedures as is contained in this document and possibly add other measure as deemed fit for ensuring that our churches are kept safe and the health of its members is not compromised. *Parish Priest is responsible to ensure that these guidelines are strictly observed.*
2. Train all volunteers and ushers; they need to be masked and able to interact with the faithful while still maintaining physical distancing.
3. Do the general cleaning of the church using spray, sanitizers and disinfectors regularly; clean the frequently touched surfaces such as pews, tables, lectern, door knobs, etc.
4. Place sign-boards and display audio/video clips, posters on hygiene, social distance etc. to heighten the awareness of the people against the spread of Covid-19.

5. As the norms on social/physical distancing restricts the number of people in the church at a given time, the Parish Priest along with the Parish Pastoral Council or/and the Safety Committee should decide about the criteria, logistics, manner etc. of inviting/restricting the number of faithful permitted at each Mass.
6. When there are more people than the church could accommodate, LCD/LED TV screens can be installed in the open area around the church or in the halls available next to the church.
7. The number of Masses may be increased. A priest can offer a maximum of three Masses on a Sunday at a Parish church, so as to reduce the number of participants for a particular Mass. If more priests are available, they can offer Masses also in the halls or other suitable places with adequate arrangement.
8. When more Masses are planned, the Mass schedule should allow sufficient time between Masses for cleaning and proper arrangement for the next Mass.
9. Churches should be kept well ventilated and seats cleansed and disinfected regularly. Adequate amount of Ethanol (70%) based sanitizers must be made available at the entrances to the church (Good quality sanitizer is available at FMHMC at reasonable rate).
10. It is recommended to have provision for washing the hands with soap and water at the entrance of the church.
11. All those attending Mass do so at their own initiative. It is important for individuals and families to take responsibility for protecting themselves and others.
12. All people should enter through the main door for proper screening and sanitization.
13. Volunteers must be present at the entrance of the church dispensing one or two drops of sanitizer on each entrant's palm.
14. Volunteers should screen the body temperature of people entering the church by using the infrared non-contact thermometer.
15. All should wear face-masks in the church premises and while entering the church; they should have it on throughout the Mass and till they leave the premises. Ushers should ensure that no one enters without a mask.
16. The holy water stoups/fonts should be dry and no sprinkling with holy water.
17. The faithful are forbidden to touch statues, books, etc. during this public health emergency. Therefore, liturgical booklets, hymnals should be removed from the pews/churches. LCD projectors may be used instead, for hymns and other recitations.
18. As for social distancing in the church, one square meter distancing is prescribed (unless it is a family from one household). If the pew is long, one could sit at either end. Keep in mind that social distancing is not just sideways but also in front and back.
19. Ushers/volunteers should guide the people to their pews / seating places. These seating places are to be marked to facilitate the observance of social distancing norm.

20. People are not to gather in the portico or near the doors of the church before or after Mass or socialize at the premises in groups. If the priest wishes to meet parishioners, physical distancing must be maintained and wearing a face mask should be considered.
21. Volunteers or others who are not vulnerable because of age or health conditions must clean and sanitize the pews and other commonly touched surfaces, as well as restrooms/toilets, immediately after every Mass. People should be discouraged using common toilets.

II. Guidelines for the Celebration of Masses

1. Masses should be of shorter duration, but evoking devotion. As time spent in proximity could increase the risk of transmission of virus, they should not go beyond 45 minutes.
2. Considerations to bear in mind for shortening Mass: announcements can be eliminated or kept brief; the celebrant can enter from the sacristy rather than in a procession; cantor sings only one verse of a hymn; use a shorter Penitential Act; prefer the shorter version of readings when an option is available; preach a brief homily; limit the number of the general intercessions.
3. The priest and all ministers present in the sacristy after vesting should wash their hands thoroughly before Mass begins.
4. The ministry of Altar Servers at the Mass is suspended until further notice.
5. It is desirable to prepare reusable/washable covers for the microphones; after every single use, they are changed.
6. The sacristan/religious/representative who prepares the ciboria with particles, handles bread and wine needs to be given clear guidelines regarding proper hygiene and sanitization of hands.
7. It is best to avoid concelebrated Masses. If unavoidable, the concelebrating priests do not sit alongside the presider's chair, but away from him. They do not assist at the altar or come to the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer. They may assist at the distribution of Holy Communion.

(a) From Introductory Rites till Liturgy of the Word

8. Health experts indicate that singing produces 6-10x more droplets from our mouths than recitation. Therefore, choir is discouraged at this time. If a choir is present, it should not have more than three members, and each member spaced at least one metre apart. In many cases, a single cantor might suffice and advisable. There is no place for pre-recorded music/singing at the liturgy.
9. If there is an Entrance Procession, the priest and all ministers walk in single file, keeping one metre distance from one another.
10. The priest and deacon, if present, approach the altar and venerate it with a profound bow, not with a kiss or touching it.
11. Introduction to the Liturgy must be brief, and it is given by the celebrant himself.

12. One reading, instead of two, may be proclaimed on Sundays. The same person who proclaims the reading should also recite the Responsorial Psalm.
13. The Gospel reading can be proclaimed from the Presidential Chair and a short homily could also be preached from there.
14. When making the Sign of the Cross at the beginning of the Gospel, avoid touching the lips; at the conclusion of the Gospel, the Book should be revered but not directly “kissed”.
15. For the Prayers of the Faithful, the celebrant can state the intentions and people are asked to pray silently; or one can also read them from the cantor’s microphone.

(b) From Liturgy of the Eucharist till the Concluding Rites

16. Offertory procession with bread, wine and other gifts is suspended for the time being.
17. Collection baskets/trays must not be passed from person to person in the pews. Long-handled collection baskets may be used, if the usher/volunteer can maintain the required physical distancing. The offertory collections could be taken up after the service, with one or several donation boxes placed at some noticeable places or volunteers standing at the doors.
18. For the distribution of the Holy Communion, use of stainless-steel bowls are recommended instead of the ciboria.
19. The bowls/ciboria used for distribution of Holy Communion must be washed with liquid soap after every Mass.
20. At the doxology, the priest alone elevates the chalice and paten.
21. No holding of hands while praying the Our Father and no hand-shake or touching others at the Sign of Peace.
22. The priest celebrant and the extraordinary ministers must wash their hands (with soap and water, at least for 20 seconds) before and after the distribution of Holy Communion.
23. The celebrant and extraordinary ministers must wear mask while distributing Holy Communion.
24. Holy Communion should be received strictly on hand and not on tongue.
25. In coming forward to receive Holy Communion, physical distancing in single file must be maintained in the procession. As far as possible, all aisles should be only for one-way traffic.
26. At the conclusion of Holy Communion, the remaining hosts are returned to the tabernacle. Then the priest purifies his fingers, then he may remove his mask, and finally, he washes or sanitizes his hands once more.
27. Directions for dismissal after Mass should be provided by the celebrant or volunteers to provide an orderly exit with proper social distancing. Pew-by-pew, for example. The faithful depart maintaining a two-metre physical distance.

III. General Pastoral and Liturgical Instructions for Priests

1. Time for celebrating Sunday Liturgy starts from Saturday after 4 p.m. On Sundays, the number of Masses could be increased, perhaps doubled.
2. Celebration of Sunday Liturgy is not permitted on week days (Monday to Saturday evening). For Masses during weekdays, follow the liturgy of the day.
3. If there is a parish hall close to the church, or a suitable place worthy for Eucharistic celebration, Masses can be celebrated simultaneously in these places depending on the availability of priests.
4. A priest should not celebrate the Mass in public or have contact with others, if he is sick, or has a cough, cold, fever and so on; an alternate arrangement must be made for the celebration of Masses.
5. For hygienic purposes, it is advisable to have separate sets of alb, chasuble and other liturgical vestments for individual priests.
6. All the parish feasts, adorations, novenas, charismatic praise and worship, and SCC meetings are suspended for the time being.
7. No catechism classes, meetings of pious associations and gatherings before/after the Mass, until further determination.
8. The Masses could be live-streamed for those who cannot attend due to various reasons. Those who do the live-streaming are required to follow strict guidelines of sanitization.
9. Churches remain open at specified times during the day for visit and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.
10. For funerals, follow the rules given by the government and the Bishop, with a maximum of 20 persons.
11. For the celebration of marriage, follow the prescribed rules issued by the government and the Bishop.
12. Annual blessing of homes is to be postponed for the time being. However, the newly built houses can be blessed on request.
13. Regular Communion to the sick is to be postponed. However, on individual request, priest can take Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.
14. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be administered by keeping a distance of 6 feet. Wearing of face masks is mandatory during the administration of this sacrament.
15. Regular Masses in Convents during weekdays as they were celebrated during the pre-Covid days, are to be resumed following proper social distancing and other safety protocols.
16. The religious places/places of worship in containment zones declared by the government shall remain closed till the zone is de-notified. Only those places of worship outside the containment zones are allowed to open-up.

IV. Guidelines for Lay Faithful

1. Persons above 65 years of age, persons with co-morbidities, pregnant women and children below 10 years are advised to stay at home and are dispensed from the Sunday obligation.
2. All enter the church through the main door and exit through the side doors. All those who come to the church will undergo the thermal checking for fever with no-contact infrared thermometer. Trained volunteers shall perform thermal screening at entry
3. Faithful having temperature equal to or more than 37.5 degree centigrade or equal to or more than 99.5 Fahrenheit or/and symptoms of cough, cold, throat pain and difficulty in breathing will not be allowed inside the church. They will be advised to seek medical consultation (Call Apathamithra helpline: 14410).
4. Cooperate with those who are doing thermal screening and follow the directions of the volunteers/ushers.
5. All those who participate in the services compulsorily should wear a facial mask at the premises and inside the church.
6. Hands must be sanitized before entering the church. It is advisable to bring your own sanitizer.
7. Make sure to follow the social distancing rules (6 feet away from others).
8. Avoid bringing flowers inside the church; do not touch statues and images inside/outside the church. Do not touch anything that belongs to someone else.
9. The sign of peace shall be expressed by bowing heads with folded hands only.
10. Enter the church few minutes before the Mass and disperse soon after the service. Do not continue to stay in church campus after the service.
11. Tissues used to clean hands, must be disposed in a dustbin and these be burned after the liturgical service.
12. Respiratory etiquettes to be strictly followed. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue, handkerchief, flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly.

V. Strictly for Priests: Importance Hygiene and Etiquette

Priests should remember well that now on people will look at the celebrant and the others present in the sanctuary more than before. They will notice their hygiene and accompanying manners. Therefore, priests should be aware of their mannerisms, which could shock or disgust the faithful in the congregation/assembly.

- 1) Always use the pall so as to avoid droplets from your mouth falling into the chalice. Only remove the pall at the moment of consecration of the wine, doxology and invitation to communion ("Behold the Lamb").

- 2) The hosts to be consecrated for the faithful should be placed in a covered ciborium and it should not be placed directly in front of the celebrant to prevent the possibility of breath or droplets accidentally reaching it during the praying and singing.
- 3) At the prayers of consecration, take care not to lean over and breathe on the Host and chalice.
- 4) The folded hands should rest on the chest; do not have them on the lips or anywhere closer to the nose or touching the eyes.
- 5) Never place your handkerchief on the altar or ambo, after use.
- 6) Ease concerns of the congregation by cleansing your hands with a sanitizer after blowing the nose, wiping the sweat, or rubbing the eyes, and so on.
- 7) People are not comfortable with anyone touching them; therefore, when giving blessing, it is best to avoid physical contact.

Finally, in harmony with the guidance of the government and the health authorities, we take courage to return to our liturgical and devotional practice in a safe and phased way. It is important that we act together and clear about what is legitimate and prudent at each stage of the process of unlocking or resuming.

There are many imponderables in what we are going through. The world cannot and will not be the same after this pandemic. This time of lockdown has allowed us to appreciate more human things, like time with family, space to reflect, the opportunity to care for our neighbours and we do not want to lose them in some return to 'normality'. Certainly, any time of trial can prepare the ground for good things, for new beginnings and a renewal of essential values.

We recently celebrated Pentecost and we know that the Spirit is always renewing. This Sunday we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ. What a wonderful day to resume the public Eucharistic celebrations in our diocese on the feast day of the Eucharist! It will feel good to be back in the presence of the Eucharist and God's people. Celebrate the return. After all, we have an embodied faith that was meant to be lived out in person, with one another. Let us keep responding to our current circumstances with confidence and creativity, assured by the promise of Jesus Christ: "Do not be afraid" (Jn 6:20) for "I am with you always to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

June 9, 2020



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