



**RICHARD FRANK STIKA**  
**BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE**

**D E C R E E**

Whereas, the Diocese of Knoxville has been monitoring the directives, recommendations and guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Tennessee State and Local Health Departments to ensure that all diocesan parishes are responding appropriately to the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19); and

Whereas, access to divine worship and to the sacraments is of high importance for the spiritual good and the overall well-being of the faithful and as responsible human beings living in society with our fellow man we have a duty towards the common good and the proportionate care and caution necessary to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 disease and as Catholics we maintain that Christian worship and sacraments are just as necessary for the human person; and

Whereas, I have taken into account the rapid decline in infection rates, hospitalizations and deaths, our emergence from the winter flu season, and the now widespread availability of vaccinations, in particular those in vulnerable demographic categories; and

Whereas, I have consulted with leaders in the Catholic healthcare system throughout the state, who support my plan outlined below and have assured me that it is prudent and reasonable; and

Through this revised decree, effective the weekend of March 27-28, 2021, Palm Sunday, I hereby mandate the following directives (procedures) regarding public Masses {Note - our pastors may contact my office and seek my permission to slightly amend these directives/procedures based upon their church seating capacity and other unique, site-specific challenges}:

1. Pastors must routinely remind the faithful that currently their obligation to attend Sunday Mass is dispensed and therefore, those who are vulnerable or elderly may continue to participate in the many live-streamed Masses our parishes offer and make a "spiritual communion." Pastors should remind their parishioners that if they have traveled out of the country, currently have or recently had a fever or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19; they shall not attend public Mass during the prescribed quarantine period. **IMPORTANT – It is my intention to restore the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, effective Pentecost Sunday (May 22-23, 2021).**
2. I am leaving significant discretion to each pastor, in consultation with their lay leadership in the parish, to discern the details of capacity restrictions in the way best suited to their community. While I am not mandating a specific capacity percentage, I would like each pastor to take into account factors such as facility capacity and physical characteristics, type of activity involved (Mass or general gathering) and location (indoor vs. outdoor) to properly assess risk and exercise good faith judgment in maintaining appropriate social distancing for each unique situation. I envision that a parish could institute the following: provide two or more different sections (pew areas) in the church. One, which ensures 3-feet of distance between each household group, and another section(s) where 6-feet of distance in all directions can be maintained, allowing individuals to choose where they sit according to their personal preference and comfort level. **IMPORTANT** – once your church is filled to the established capacity restriction, if applicable, direct parishioners to another campus location where the Mass is simulcast/live-streamed or another Mass is celebrated). Pastors are highly encouraged to increase the number of Masses if needed to accommodate the faithful.



3. Cloth face coverings are required at all worship services and social events.
4. Holy water fonts should remain completely dry. Remove all hymnals, Daily Missals and other items normally found in the pew book holders. Individual liturgy/music sheets may be made available so long as the parishioner takes the sheet with them as they exit the church.
5. Continue to refrain from passing collection baskets from person-to-person and instead have the ushers use **collection baskets with extended handles** or fixed collection basket location(s) in the narthex so that parishioners can place their donation while entering or exiting the church. At **EACH** live-streamed Mass, remind the parishioners at home to continue to support the parish through on-line giving.
6. Do not hold hands during the recitation of the Our Father.
7. Omit the Sign of Peace or exchange it without physical contact (bow of the head).
8. Holy Communion shall be distributed as follows: A single Holy Communion distribution point will be located at the front of the church and at the rear of the church. For those church buildings that have an altar rail they may distribute to communicants who are kneeling at the rail and are a minimum of 3-feet apart. Pastors serving at churches that have transepts may locate their distribution points at the far right and far left ends of the transepts respectively. An assigned usher will call parishioners to the Holy Communion distribution points by individual pew/row via the center aisle (or side aisle for those with transepts). **IMPORTANT – regardless of the location of the Holy Communion distribution points (front/rear, communion rail, far end of each transept or at another church campus location where the Mass is being simulcast) the following procedures are mandatory (non-negotiable):** Once you leave your pew/chair you will proceed single file (maintaining 3-feet apart) to the distribution point. Immediately before you reach the distribution point you will sanitize your hands with 70% alcohol-based sanitizing gel/solution (which will be on a small table directly in front of the distribution point). Standing on the floor-marked X (or kneeling at the 3-foot marked locations along the communion rail), you will extend your arms and hands toward the priest/deacon with the palm of your non-writing hand facing up and completely flat supported by your writing hand. The priest/deacon (who at this particular time will be wearing a protective facemask) will then place the Host onto your palm without touching your hand. The communicant will immediately consume the Host, place their protective mask back on and proceed to their pew/seat. The reception of the Sacred Host on the tongue will be permitted so long as the following restrictions are **strictly enforced**:
  - The distribution of the Sacred Host on the tongue will take place in a separate, distinct line **dedicated only to those desiring to receive on the tongue**. If this cannot be achieved then the distribution of the Sacred Host on the tongue will be received **after the Mass has ended**.
  - The cleric or assigned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion **MUST** disinfect his/her hands in-between **EACH** communicant.
  - Those parishes who offer the Extraordinary Form of the *Missale Romanum* in a Mass may distribute the Sacred Host on the tongue using the normal communion lines – however, the cleric **MUST** disinfect his/her hands in-between **EACH** communicant.
9. Singing is permitted (both choir and parishioners). If the cantor/organist/choir member is not separated by a Plexiglas screen/patrician they must also wear a facemask and maintain 3-feet, social distancing.
10. With regard to meetings and gatherings, please follow the capacity guidelines outlined in #2 above. Food and beverages may be made available in either pre-packaged or pre-portioned containers. You may also serve food and drink with designated persons serving or plating the food. Designated servers must be masked, gloved and sanitized. Designated servers will be the only ones having direct contact with the food, serving utensils, and/or drink. Food and drink should be plated or served in such a way that allows persons to approach a table and retrieve their own food and drink, or that of their family group. Disposable plates and cups are recommended, with each person discarding their own items after the meal.



11. Once all parishioners have exited the church or meeting space, pastors must ensure the cleaning and disinfecting of touched surfaces (i.e. pews, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, toilets, faucets, sinks) with household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for these surfaces. Those assigned to clean and disinfect should wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Gloves should be discarded after each cleaning. If reusable gloves are used, those gloves should be dedicated for cleaning and disinfection of surfaces for COVID-19 and should not be used for other purposes. Consult the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfection products used. Wash hands for 20 seconds immediately after gloves are removed. If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. Diluted household bleach solutions can be used, if appropriate for the surface. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. To prepare a bleach solution you will mix as follows:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water, or
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

If soft (porous) surfaces such as pew cushions, carpeted floors, rugs, and drapes have been contaminated by bodily fluids - remove visible contamination and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. (See Diocese of Knoxville website for additional information on cleaning and disinfection).

12. Additional items each pastor should consider:

A. The church should post a link to the COVID-19 exposure questions on their website (i.e., have you traveled out of the country, do you have a fever, have you been exposed to someone with COVID-19, etc.?) If a parishioner answers yes to any of these, we recommend they do not attend Mass at the church.

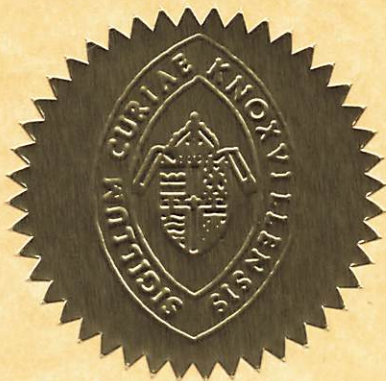
B. It may be necessary to install temporary markings (cones/tape), directing the flow of foot traffic in and out of the church. Only one entrance into the church is recommended to ensure control of the number of individuals entering the building.

C. Ideally, entrance door(s) should be propped open to allow entry without the need to touch door handles. The doors can be closed and locked once Mass begins and then reopened concluding Mass. If this is not an option, recommend designating an employee or volunteer to hold the door open.

D. It will be important to have orderly seating and dismissal of parishioners. First parishioners arriving should be ushered to front of church and fill in the rest of the seating areas as more enter. After Mass, parishioners should be ushered out of church starting at the back pew working toward the front.

E. Hand sanitizer should be provided at each entrance for parishioners to utilize. Either pump bottles could be placed on tables or, provide free standing pumps that you place your hand under and the sanitizer drops down. It is also recommended that you suggest to your parishioners that they bring their own hand sanitizer with them while in attendance.

Given at the Chancery this 25<sup>th</sup> day of March in the Year of Our Lord 2021.



+ Richard F. Stika

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika  
Bishop of Knoxville

Deacon Sean K. Smith

Deacon Sean K. Smith  
Chancellor