DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF WORSHIP

COVID-19 Update: Guidance for Parishes
September 22, 2021

COVID-19 is now "a highly contagious communicable disease that presents a serious risk of harm to the public health" under New York State's HERO Act. The CDC has also indicated that New York State's rate of transmission is "high."

Vaccinations

Participation at in-person Masses and other parish events *should not* be contingent on vaccination status. (Please refer to the Bishop's letter issued September 3, 2021 for information regarding religious exemptions in other settings.)

Masks

Masks are now mandated for all participants in the liturgy, *especially when in close proximity to those of other households (for entry, exit, and when receiving Holy Communion).* When seated, participants may "relax their mask" if they feel comfortable to do so. Reduction of capacity/seating to introduce more space is at the discretion of the parish.

Eucharistic Ministers & Altar Ministry

As before, masks are required for those distributing the Eucharist. Eucharistic Ministers should limit in-home visits to close family.

Anyone in the sanctuary should limit close exposure and all should practice good hygiene. For example, instead of having a server hold their missal, presiders should consider holding it or placing it on a stand. If a deacon is present, there should be distance between him and the celebrant.

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Basic Hygiene Remains Important

If a person does not feel well, has a temperature greater than or equal to 100°, or is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they should stay home and seek medical attention.

When present in church, all participants should:

— Exercise coughing/sneezing etiquette;
— Limit what they touch;
— Limit personal contact such as hugging and hand shaking
— Wash hands properly and often.

Cleaning

After each liturgy, worship spaces should continue to be disinfected, especially high-risk areas or frequently touched surfaces.

Singing

Consider any music, congregational singing, or chanting as appropriate to your setting, based on vaccination rates, risk tolerance, and vulnerability of your community members.

Activities such as congregational singing involve a risk of COVID-19 transmission, assuming a mixed population of vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Overall, singing should still be limited.

— Physical distancing between individual singers and musicians, and also between ensembles and congregants is essential.
— When possible, reduce the number of singers in ensembles.
— Support singers with microphones, as a recent National Institutes of Health study showed that breathing, speaking, and singing at a moderate volume produce an equivalent amount of aerosol droplets.
— Instruments that have a potential to release droplets into the air (woodwind, brass, etc.) should not be used.
— Good ventilation is key.