

Diocese of Reno

Proposed Parish COVID-19 Protocols

November 2021

General Principles....

- ***We encourage all persons who can to be vaccinated.
 - We will not issue religious exemptions
 - We do encourage government and other employers to grant Conscience exemptions.
- We **recommend** that those who are not vaccinated take precautions to protect themselves and others (including masks and social distancing).
- We follow State Mandates to the best of our ability (carefully distinguish between required and recommended)
 - Visible signs at entrances
 - However, **NO policing** / people should be accommodated and welcomed, not turned away or offended. ***They may be invited or politely offered a mask but should not be treated in any aggressive or disciplinary way.***
 - Protocols may differ by county; flexibility and pastoral adaptation is needed to deal with the particular situation and demographic concerns of each parish.
- We will need to compare how protocols are applied in other sectors of each county.
- Schools should follow guidance from Superintendent's office; Religious Education practices should match school guidance for each county.
- Church should be a safe but not overly restrictive environment as compared with parishioners' experience in other similar environments.
- Our situation is becoming more complex as Flu season is beginning; this warrants continued mitigation practices (within reason)
- We need to remember that things may change quickly and substantially should the virus mutate into one that is resistant to vaccine and / or more serious.
- Surface sanitization is no longer needed for COVID mitigation; standard cleaning practices are fine (COVID is not primarily transmitted by touch or ingestion).
- No pre-registration is needed and no attendance records need to be taken or maintained
- Full occupancy is permitted but each parish should reserve some space for those who do desire social distancing and masking. This is an important accommodation.
- We want everyone to feel safe, welcome, and accommodated (within reason) depending upon their comfort level. ***This is not a time to alienate anyone by our policing.***
- Remember to pay attention to the four critical mitigation factors:
 - Fresh Air,
 - Social Distance,
 - Masks,
 - Duration of time together.
 - As we reduce one we need to increase the others.
 - ****Masses should be shorter rather than longer (readings, homilies, songs, etc.)

Practical norms for Mass:

- ***Permission for General Absolution is officially revoked***; conditions do not currently exist for this exceptional rite. Should the situation change then this issue may be re-visited in the future.
- Confessions should be offered in a larger area with fresh air or air purifiers (virus/germ sanitizing) in the room; privacy should be provided for when possible (screen is best to prevent possible aspiration of virus)
- Printed materials including bulletins, hymnals and other such things may be used.
- Parishioners should have the availability of hand sanitizer when entering the church.
- Ministers (including cantors and lectors) may be un-masked when they are speaking (or singing).
- Holy Water may be placed in Baptismal Fonts and other dispensers as before (but with caution in light of the Flu season). This decision is up to pastoral discretion. (We have non-touch Holy Water fonts at each door here at OLOT church).
- Incense may be used as before COVID
- You may return to the pre-COVID number of altar servers
- ***Singing should be carefully monitored*** – it presents the highest risk for contagion. Choirs should be minimal and spaced away from each other (if in close proximity then choir members should be masked); congregational singing should be minimal as well. Instrumentals are recommended for Offertory and Communion.
- Collection may resume as usual at Offertory
- Hand sanitization need not take place in the sanctuary prior to the distribution of Communion; it can be done in a more discreet way by extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.
- Standard protocols that govern food handling should especially be observed by the priest, deacon, or Eucharistic Ministers during Mass (no touching of face, coughing in hand, etc. without proper cleansing)
- Reception of Communion on the tongue is permitted for those who prefer to receive our Lord that way; sanitization is advisable if contact is made with a parishioner's mouth area (more due to Flu concerns than COVID concerns).
- Ministers of Holy Communion should wear a mask when distributing the Eucharist. (Priests, deacons, EMHC).
- Remind parishioners of the protocol for receiving communion:
 - lower mask when approaching the priest or minister,
 - receive Communion,
 - then replace mask and return to pew.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood remains suspended at this time (more due to Flu than COVID)
- Sign of Peace is permitted; each pastor will need to decide whether this will be welcome by his parish at this time or not.
- Live-Streaming of Masses may continue but posted recordings of Masses are discouraged (people who are staying at home should tune in live to “attend” Mass). If you discontinue live-streaming then please publish other options for your home-bound parishioners.

- The use of separate chalices is encouraged when concelebrating Mass (or Intinction in a separate chalice from that of the main celebrant). This protocol is more for the prevention of Flu than COVID.
- A reminder that a priest or deacon (only) is to always (and only) purify the Sacred Vessels before they are cleansed by sacristans – The Real Presence of Jesus remains in even 1 drop of Precious Blood. For this reason, ordained ministers (or instituted acolytes) are to purify the vessels.
- ***Coffee and Donut gatherings (and similar receptions) are permitted and guidelines for restaurants should be observed (masked until seated at table). The same goes for other parish events where food and drink are served.***

**Please be pro-active in reaching out to engage parishioners in parish life and welcome them back to church. Do not be a barrier to their presence. It will require pastoral sensitivity to welcome everyone back to in-person worship given their different vulnerabilities and preferences.