

DIocese of San Bernardino



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DATE: August 24, 2020
Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle

FROM: Bishop Barnes 

TO: Pastors, Administrators, Pastoral Coordinators and Parish Staff

RE: Update on Pastoral Life and Safety Precautions

Dear Pastors, Administrators, Pastoral Coordinators and Parish Staff:

During the past six months, we have issued numerous directives for the celebration of Mass and the sacraments during this time of national pandemic. Like so many things with this COVID virus, these directives reflect the ever-changing environment here in California – transitioning worship services from complete closure/live-stream only, to limitations on ‘indoor’ services, and now – this past month – the transition to ‘outdoor’ services.

These ‘transitions’ have been confusing and overwhelming for our parishes, particularly in their implementation and oversight. Nonetheless, we **MUST** remain **VIGILANT** in our enforcement of these guidelines if we are to operate safely and securely, with limited risk of community spread.

While outdoor services have some additional flexibility under the directives and guidelines issued by Governor Newsom and administered by CalOSHA, there are several of these guidelines which require additional adherence by our parishes, if we are to continue ‘outdoor’ services in compliance with these regulations, and avoid the risk of closure.

Let me share with you some of the items which I feel must be addressed more consistently and comprehensively in our parishes to ensure uniform compliance with the State and Diocesan requirements:

Physical Spaces

- Outdoor canopies **MUST** be used for all outdoor services, at all times. Parishioners cannot retain attention in these surroundings if they are physically uncomfortable due to sun and heat. If canopies are not available, then return to livestream until these accommodations can be made. We do not wish to risk the health and well-being of parishioners from heat-related impacts such as dehydration and heat stroke.

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- Do NOT allow parishioners to relocate chairs and seating outside, reducing the mandated six-foot separation. Ensure that parish ushers/volunteers are diligent in enforcing this. Post additional signage if necessary, emphatically stating that readjusting chairs is not allowed.
- Ensure that ushers have access to bottled water, first aid kits and 911 contact, if needed.
- Implement sufficient on-site security to guarantee the protection of all during these uncertain times, including diligent enforcement of all on-site physical space requirements by a separate 'monitor'/volunteer/usher.
- Individuals assigned security should not be assigned other duties such as ushering or sanitizing. They must focus first and foremost on security.

Pastoral Implementations

- No 'drive-through' or 'in-the-car' sacraments or services, of any kind, are permitted. This practice ensures that we are not exceeding our 100 outdoor maximum as required. Although this outdoor occupancy cap of 100 persons is far less than what many of our parish sites can accommodate, at this writing, it remains in effect. However, further clarification and waivers are being discussed with both County Public Health Officials, to determine if any exceptions can be granted, despite the continuing increase in COVID statistics within our two counties.
- Holy Communion may not be distributed by priests/deacons car-by-car. Should a particular parishioner not be able to attend the outdoor service for whatever reason, encourage them to remain at home and live-stream, until such time as these implementations are amended.
- Empower ushers/volunteers to enforce the MASK REQUIRED rule at all times. Acknowledging that some parishioners may have objections to this, it does NOT change the fact that masks must be worn at all times, by all individuals older than two years of age. Those that have health issues which preclude wearing masks, should be encouraged to remain at home and live-stream; we cannot assume the responsibility for oversight of an individual's health profile in compliance of this directive.
- Advise parishioners through signage, website notifications or public announcements during services, that ANY parishioner refusing to wear masks/face shields will NOT be admitted to the service. Any parishioner removing their mask/face shield during the service, will be asked to replace the mask by the ushers/volunteers; failing to do so, will result in the parishioner(s) being escorted out of the service. Ensure that a minimum of two ushers/volunteers approach the individual, when requiring them to exit. Acknowledging that this can indeed be an awkward moment during service, as a Diocese and parish, we must demonstrate to other parishioners, who are complying with the mask requirement, that we are concerned for their health and that of their families, by seriously enforcing these State and Diocesan directives. (Please contact our Emergency Operations Collaborative (EOC) Director for further 'how-to's in handling and reporting this type of situation, if you are experiencing it in your parish.)

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- Outdoor 'meetings' of a maximum of ten (10) persons with social distancing and other COVID protocols, are permitted under canopies. These can be accommodated throughout the day, via staggered schedules, and employed by ministry leaders, catechists, or other parish leadership, as needed.
- Ministering to the home-bound or sick is an important part of our Church's pastoral care and is encouraged. However, please ensure that those visiting the sick are approved to do so by the individual's physician, due to risk of exposure to those with weakened immune systems. Ensure that those visiting are themselves in good health and taking all necessary COVID precautions when visiting the home.
- Ministering to those in rest homes, convalescent homes, assisted living etc. is also encouraged, but, rules on such visits are under the auspices of the owner of that care facility. Following those guidelines/requirements are in addition to our individual COVID protocols and self-tests on health, which we must follow.

Before closing, let me add some additional clarifications on requests that my office has been receiving with respect to parish activities, commonly held during non-COVID times, and which are such a part of parish fellowship. Note the accommodations below, which allow for an expanded parish connection, without violating any State requirement for houses of worship.

Hospitality/Fellowship/Family Assistance

- Traditional parish hospitality such as pot-lucks, 'spaghetti dinners', recognition dinners and celebrations are NOT permitted, even if held outdoors. We must remember that the State directives now are driven by the 'core business' of the employer/institution. For the Diocese, that is 'house of worship'. We cannot operate as a restaurant, bakery, clothing store, etc. ALL outdoor activity must be 'worship-based' OR directly connected to the mission of the parish such as counseling, religious instruction, and social services to our poor, homeless, and needy brothers and sisters.
- Food pantry services have been considered an ESSENTIAL, INFRASTRUCTURE SECTOR under Federal and State guidelines from the onset of the virus. Detailed COVID protocols and food handling/preparation guidelines, including safety precautions for those working at the food pantries, were provided by EOC to all food pantry representatives/parishes several months ago. (Contact EOC if you wish these re-issued to your team.)
- Food pantries may also distribute sundries such as personal hygiene products; household goods; sanitation supplies; essential clothing such as diapers, blankets, jackets, coats, and anything needed by our poor, homeless, and poor brothers and sisters.
- Parishes MAY provide, in a manner similar to that of its food pantries, these same type of items under its 'social work' mandate. Distribution of these must be made in the same manner as food pantries – at no charge and with all the COVID protocol implementations in place.

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- Pre-packaged dinners, prepared in the kitchen by COVID protocol food preparers, may also be distributed in a drive-by system or reservation pick-up arrangement. However, these reservations must not indicate any form of 'sale'; reservations for the meals must indicate that a DONATION is suggested of "X dollars". Under no circumstances may parishioners remain on site for dining or social conversation. (Contact EOC if you have any questions on specific variations of this option.)

We are facing a most difficult time as a nation, state and county region. As a faith-based community, fellowship, hospitality, faith-sharing are part of the fabric of who we are as a Church. I want to thank you for all the adjustments you and your parishioners have had to make during this time. Thank you for stepping-up to meet the challenge. You have engaged your people, as a community, to assist with all the physical changes necessary; setting-up the outdoor space for liturgies, sanitizing, monitoring, making the environment for liturgy so welcoming and sacred. Thank you for the attention you have given to first aid ministries, liturgical music without singing and reminding people of our need to cooperate so that we can together combat this pandemic. It has not been easy for anyone of us. Yet through it all you have been creative and together with your people, as a community of faith, have risen to the occasion. Thank you.

As summer ends, as our children return to school at-home and on-line, and as we try to navigate the needed restrictions placed on our basic way of living, we all will be challenged by the need of our parishes to develop new ways by which to maintain a sense of connection with our people. During the next few weeks, I will be working closely with our Diocesan Curia, Vicars Forane, Presbyteral Council and lay leaders to develop and share some new programs and projects which we can implement within our parishes to enhance the sense of Church community. In the meantime, let us keep one another in prayer under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Bernardine who pray for us.

As Saint Paul tells us, I thank God daily for your faith and dedication in your ministry. May Our Lord bless you and your parish communities with safety and good health.