



Guidelines for approaching Advent and Christmas 2020 During COVID-19 in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

November 23, 2020

Where We Are Now

This current juncture is a very difficult time in the pandemic, with a surge of COVID patients at local hospitals, and the very real prospect of medical facilities and personnel being overwhelmed.

As of now, religious services are exempted from the new social gatherings limitations required by the state. Public Masses can continue, and our track record since the reopening indicates we can be confident that our pandemic directives have been very effective.

That said, it is **CRITICAL** to repeatedly exhort all parishioners to abide by [our directives](#) (which remain unchanged) in the weeks ahead – *especially* mask wearing. Should community spread be traced to a celebration of Mass in the diocese, then our assertion that we provide a safe environment risks intense scrutiny and a loss of credibility if new lockdown measures end up being proposed for various segments of society.

Please also keep in mind that the severity of the situation in a particular location might recommend measures different from the rest of the diocese. As noted in our directives:

“If there is a localized outbreak of COVID-19 involving a particular community or parish, pastors should immediately consult with the Vicar General about potentially suspending Masses at their parishes.”

Looking at the Liturgical Seasons Ahead

Presuming we continue with public liturgies, what follows is guidance for how to approach the celebration of Advent and Christmas. Particular attention is devoted to the matter of accommodating potentially large crowds on Christmas.



- **Regarding usual Holy Days of Obligation:** The current dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass applies to both Sundays and holy days (including Immaculate Conception on Dec 8, Christmas, and Mary Mother of God on Jan 1).

- **Advent Penance Services**
 - As previously noted, it remains up to the discretion of individual pastors whether to organize and host Advent penance services in the coming weeks, but all our liturgical directives must be closely followed.

 - Confession directives in this context include:
 - Masks/face coverings required for confessor and penitents
 - Social distancing of 6 feet in lines and between confessor and penitent
 - Holding indoor confessions only in large/well-ventilated areas (no traditional confessional boxes or booths)
 - Situating people to ensure that nobody in line is close enough to hear ongoing confessions

- **New Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto on December 10**
 - Pope Francis has ordered the inscription of Our Lady of Loreto into the General Roman Calendar on December 10.
 - Per the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship: “The Blessed Virgin Mary under this title is venerated especially at the Holy House in Loreto, Italy – piously said to have been the site of the Annunciation in Nazareth – and is the patron saint of those who travel via aircraft.”
 - Information on the proper liturgical texts can be found here: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/our-lady-of-loreto>. Note that the Roman Missal’s “Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary: II. In Advent” (using the second Collect option) would be most appropriate for this occasion.

- **Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**
 - Per the USCCB Secretariat for Divine Worship: “The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe [falls] on a Saturday (December 12, 2020), and will thus be celebrated liturgically only until the beginning of the Third Sunday of Advent that evening (that is, anticipated Masses and Evening Prayer I are of the Sunday).”
 - Pandemic directives regarding devotional practices tied to Our Lady of Guadalupe (and also Las Posadas) have been prepared in conjunction with our Hispanic Ministries Office and were sent to Hispanic and bilingual parishes. Copies of this document can be provided to others upon request.



Considerations for Christmas Masses

- While we are fortunate to be able to accommodate higher numbers in our churches compared those in other states during this pandemic, social distancing is still an absolute requirement and can pose a challenge for anticipated Christmas crowds.
- **Vigil start time:** Please note that Bishop Rhoades has determined that Vigil Masses on December 24 in Fort Wayne-South Bend should not begin before the normally established time of 4:00 PM.
- Bishop Rhoades is allowing all priests in the diocese to make use of an indult granted by the Holy See, whereby **any priest may celebrate up to four Masses on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, for this year only.**
 - Note that Masses on the morning of December 24 count against the total number of Masses a priest may say that day, so a priest who will be celebrating multiple Masses for the Vigil may wish to consider not celebrating Mass on the morning of December 24.
 - The Christmas Mass “During the Night” may be celebrated before midnight (e.g., 9 PM or 10 PM). That would count towards an individual priest’s December 24 Mass total. If the Mass During the Night begins at midnight, it counts towards December 25.
- **Suggestions for Scheduling**
 - Make **livestreams** of the Christmas Masses available to those staying home.
 - **Well-prepared ushers/greeters** will be needed at Christmas Masses to ensure crowd management is conducted smoothly.
 - In particular, parishes must be prepared to inform new visitors (who perhaps haven’t attended Mass since the reopening in May) of our mask policy, and distribute face masks as needed.
 - Where possible, potential **overflow crowds** could be directed to another large, well-ventilated site at the parish (such as a gym) to participate in the Mass via livestream.
 - Where enough priests are available at a parish, **simultaneous Masses** could also be held at aforementioned overflow sites during the busiest times.



- **All diocesan directives** for churches must also be applied to these overflow sites (masks, distancing, etc.)
- Although Masses on Christmas Eve are the most popular, **offer multiple Masses on Christmas Day** and encourage parishioners to make use of those. A Mass can also be scheduled in the afternoon/evening on Christmas Day if it seems like an option that parishioners would utilize.
- Especially when trying to schedule numerous Vigil Masses back-to-back-to-back, **aim to keep Masses relatively short**. Generally speaking, shorter is also safer when gathering indoors with a large group.
- **Online RSVPs:** If you anticipate that an overwhelming number of parishioners would gravitate towards attending particular Mass times, it could be extremely helpful to institute online sign-ups to manage crowds for particular Christmas Masses.

Several parishes utilized one of these free RSVP websites at the beginning of the reopening back in May:

- www.eventbrite.com
- www.signupgenius.com (from one pastor in the diocese: "We are going to use SignUpGenius because it allows us to set a capacity. Then as people register it gives an update on the number of remaining spots which makes it easier to even out attendance.")

If you will be conducting sign-ups in this manner, be sure to build some inevitable walk-ins into your calculations. A pre-registration system won't be perfect, but it could still help steer crowds to some degree.

- **Emphasize the Octave:** Again, there is no obligation to attend Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity itself. And while we would not necessarily want to broadly discourage people from doing so, there could be value in explicitly encouraging those uncomfortable with braving the crowds on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day to instead attend sometime during the Octave of Christmas.

With that in mind, Masses during the Octave could be celebrated with a greater level of solemnity than might otherwise be done.



➤ **Regarding Music at Christmas**

- All singing protocols from [our directives](#) still stand. Unfortunately, during Christmas we will still have no congregational singing, nor regular choirs.
- A small vocal ensemble or schola remains possible, when utilizing the distancing and precautionary options spelled out in the directives.
 - Note that if you have a married couple or a family of singers who belong to a single household, that group of singers need not distance from each other (but still must strictly abide by distancing from anyone outside their household).
 - Anecdotally, these [specially designed masks](#) and the less-expensive KN95 masks have been described as especially well-suited for singers.
- If there is concern that having cantors sing familiar Christmas carols will inspire the congregation to join in involuntarily, perhaps plan on instrumental versions or choral arrangements (if you have a vocal ensemble).
- **Musical Instruments:** Plan on string instruments, handbells, and the like rather than brass or woodwind. Brass and woodwind can only be safely employed if all applicable player masks and instrument bell covers are used (see here for examples: <https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/musician-personal-protective-gear.list>), along with the same distancing measures required for singers.