



Memo

Date: May 18, 2021
To: Priests and deacons
From: The Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
Re: Pentecost Letter

[\(SPANISH\)](#)

Peace and all good to you!

I want to open this letter with a note of deep gratitude. Each of you has had a tremendously stressful year. You have had to come up with ways to deliver the sacraments to your people during a dangerous global pandemic. Many of you have buried too many of your own parishioners because of it. All of you had to put yourselves at risk to serve your people. I am so grateful for you and for your work.

The Easter Season is always a time of joy and hope. It's an invitation to celebrate the redemption of the world and often a time for people to return to church. The Eucharist, in the Vatican document *Lumen Gentium*, is called "the source and summit of the Christian life." Jesus himself tells us, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." (John 6: 54-56)

You cannot bring the Eucharist to your flock virtually -- not the way Jesus intended. Now that vaccines are available to any Georgian older than 16, I believe it is time to begin to bring more people physically back to church.

Pentecost is the birthday of the church and a time when we should let the Holy Spirit guide our path. It is an appropriate time to take our next step forward to full reopening of our churches.

On May 22, prior to the celebration of the Vigil of Pentecost, the general dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass will expire in the

Archdiocese of Atlanta. While the general dispensation will lift, I will put into place some exceptions for certain circumstances. They are outlined below. We are also making changes to our general guidelines and procedures. They are outlined after the exceptions.

While the general dispensation is removed, there are specific instances where the dispensation will still be applicable, as well as some circumstances in which there is no obligation in the first place. One does not have an obligation to attend Mass on Sunday in the following circumstances:

1. You are ill or you have a health condition that would be significantly compromised if you were to contract a communicable illness (i.e., you have underlying conditions or are in a high-risk category). Please use the dispensation and do not attend Mass.
2. You are experiencing flu-like symptoms.
3. You have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or you have reason to think you might be asymptomatic of a contagious illness.
4. You care for the sick, homebound, or infirm.
5. You are pregnant.
6. You are 65 years of age or older (per the CDC's recommendation of high-risk individuals).
7. You cannot attend Mass through no fault of your own (e.g., no Mass is offered, you are infirm, your ride did not show up, the church was at capacity).
8. You have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.

These categories will be reviewed in due course and revised as needed.

Persons legitimately dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass are still to observe the Lord's Day by participating in a broadcast of the Sunday Mass or by spending time in prayer and meditating on Scripture, either individually or as a family.

General Guidelines:

In keeping with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [updated guidelines](#) concerning fully-vaccinated people, the Archdiocese of Atlanta will continue to recommend masks in the parishes during any activities, but will give pastors discretion to allow vaccinated people to remove them. Those who are not vaccinated should still wear a mask. We will have to rely on peoples' honesty, as we cannot ask for their personal health information. This guidance applies to parishes, not schools. Please check with

your school principal for details on the school policy.

We will maintain social distancing in our parishes, in accordance with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control. This means people should maintain a reasonable healthy distance between themselves and others who are outside of their families. You can still have outdoor Masses to accommodate more people. Examine your seating arrangements carefully and see how you can safely fit more people into your parish while still maintaining a safe distance between family units. You may wish to ask your ushers and your congregation to help in this effort as they are seated. You may also wish to continue using overflow spaces where the Mass is broadcast to those who don't fit into the main sanctuary.

We will continue to monitor the CDC as well as local health agencies guidelines and will go back to masks should the situation changes in any of our communities.

Holy water can be added back into fonts, but should be changed several times per week and the containers should be sanitized when the water is changed. You also have the option to add a sprinkling rite to all Masses instead of filling the holy water fonts. Make clear to the congregation that they are not required to bless themselves with holy water as they enter the church, but can use it if they wish.

Churches should still be cleaned between liturgies.

Worship aids/missalettes/ collections

Since the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization have indicated that surfaces are not a great risk factor in spreading the COVID-19 illness, we encourage you to consider putting missalettes and hymnals back into the pews. While congregational singing is still discouraged, we will continue to review these guidelines and will add back singing later.

Bulletins can be left out for the congregation to pick up. Ushers should not hand them out.

You may continue to use a centrally located basket for the congregation to drop off offertory envelopes. You can also have ushers use collection baskets with handles so people can drop in their offering without having to pass the basket themselves. Ushers can use gloves or hand sanitizer if they wish.

Please take up all second collections included in the regular calendar on the dates appointed. Many ministries depend upon these collections to continue their work and it is important to continue to support these collections. Please make an effort to publicize these collections within your parish community so those who donate online can also designate donations to those as well.

Offertory Procession

This procession can be added back into the liturgy. The sacristan should keep the gifts covered or put away until it is time for the procession. If possible, use cruets and ciborium with lids. Those bringing up the gifts should sanitize or wash their hands before they pick up the gifts. They can also use disposable gloves if they wish.

Sign of Peace

The congregation can offer a sign of peace without a handshake by acknowledging one another with a nod, a wave or some other non-contact greeting.

Distribution of Communion

Holy Communion will be distributed only by host. You are encouraged to allow your congregation to receive in the hand or on the tongue, as each individual prefers. You may wish to designate some distribution stations as hand-only so people will feel more comfortable. Be sure you clearly communicate how your system will work to your congregation. You can also keep sanitizer nearby to sanitize your hands as needed.

Other updates

Attached to this memo you will also find [revised guidelines for visitation of the sick](#). It would be prudent to contact any facility you used to visit to see if they are allowing pastoral visits again.

I wanted to send this out in time for you to make plans with your staff for how to safely welcome people back. I have also written a letter for the people of the Archdiocese that you can share with your community. You can find it [here](#). Let us pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit as we prepare for this Pentecost.